these city walls

by
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FADE IN:

Grainy early-80s VIDEO FOOTAGE OF RONALD REAGAN --

RONALD REAGAN
... I am not frightened by what lies ahead. And I don't believe the American people are frightened by what lies ahead. Together... together we're going to do what has to be done. We're going to put America back to work again. I aim to try and tap that great American spirit that opened up this completely undeveloped continent from coast to coast and made it a great nation, survived several wars, survived a great Depression, and we'll survive the problems that we face right now...

FADE TO:

The wide, flaring NOSTRILS of a THOROUGHBRED HORSE in SLOW MOTION MID-RUN -- determined and free. PULL BACK revealing a JOCKEY on the horse. PULL BACK further revealing SEVERAL HORSES and JOCKEYS -- all part of a RACE. PULLING BACK further, we see the race is actually on a MOUNTED T.V.

CLOSE ON RUBEN

20, lanky and youthful, stares up at the screen with wide-eyed wonder. OLD MEN and assorted RIFFRAFF surround him, egging the horses on. Ruben takes a last look at the horses and heads for the door.

EXT. OTB (OFF TRACK BETTING) - DAY

Ruben steps out, pulls on the HEADPHONES of a WALKMAN.

Super: **New York City, Winter 1983**

EXT. STREETS - DAY

There's a fine layer of frost over everything. A grey sky. Folks are bundled up behind layers of clothing. SHOPKEEPERS are taking down their NEW YEARS EVE DECORATIONS --

Signs read: *GOODBYE '82, HELLO '83*

Streets are alive with CRIMINAL ACTIVITY. A 3 CARD MONTE GAME -- a CON MAN HUSTLING FAKE WATCHES TO TOURISTS -- a GRAFFITI ARTIST TAGGING A WALL --

Ruben passes them all. Seems at ease in these VICIOUS SURROUNDINGS, but can't hide the TRACE OF INNOCENCE THAT STILL GLOWS BENEATH THE HARD VENEER.

INT. DRUG STORE - DAY

Ruben walks up to the counter, throws down several boxes of ROBITUSSUN. The CLERK eyes him strangely.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Ruben heads up the street. Notices ALAMIDE (Uh-lah-mee-day) -- black, mid-20s, skinny, cool and cautious, hair in corn-rows -- on a corner WATCHING THE BANK across the street.

RUBEN
Yo, Alamide.

-- who REACHES INTO HIS JACKET, relaxes when he sees --

ALAMIDE
Ruben, man. Sneakin' up on a motherfucker and shit.

They do their SECRET HANDSHAKE.

RUBEN
Wassup?

ALAMIDE
You, man, you.

RUBEN
Yo, check it out, man.

Ruben does a short BREAKDANCE MANEUVER with his arms.

ALAMIDE
That's awright, but you gotta put something on it. Check it.

Alamide mimics the move, but elaborates with his body.

RUBEN
That's pretty fresh, man. What're you doin' way up here?

ALAMIDE
Ah, lookin' out on drops, you know. Chinese motherfucker in there, man? He come in three times last week. Chinese is hard workers, man, no muh-fuckin' joke.

RUBEN
Probably put up a fight though.

ALAMIDE
Nah, man. Ain't his money, store's insured. Easy, peasy, Chinesey.

Alamide sees the CHINESE GUY come out of the bank.

ALAMIDE
You wanna walk?

EXT. STREET - DAY

Alamide and Ruben walk up the densely packed sidewalk, keeping a close eye on the Chinese Guy ahead. Their interaction is effortless, like brothers.

ALAMIDE
I got the idea... you heard of *The Tao of Jeet Kun Do*?

RUBEN
That's the book with all the moves.

ALAMIDE
Diagrams, all that shit. And, you know, my man's peoples came down on him stupid quick for bringin' all them ancient Chinese secrets to the white man. But he say --
(does a Bruce Lee yell)
-- open up his own school and shit. So that's what I'm'unna do. Get enough green, open up a school, teach the white folks how to dance like them brothers they be throwin' quarters at.

RUBEN
Damn, man, that's a great idea.

ALAMIDE
Motherfuckin' outlaw, man. Bet. Just gotta keep movin' on that one big sting, though, you know? Get my game straight.
(beat)
Anything get outta this fuckin' life, you know.

RUBEN
(looks around)
This place kills everything good, man. I had enough to set myself up, I'd be gone.

ALAMIDE
I hear that. What's in the bag, man?

RUBEN
Robitusson.

ALAMIDE
Mr. Man got sick hos?

RUBEN
Nah, they drink it for the codeine. Makes 'em itch bad though, I dunno.

ALAMIDE
Here we go.

Alamide watches the Chinese Guy head into a PAWN SHOP.

RUBEN
I gotta get back. You wanna see a horror movie next week or something?

ALAMIDE
Yeah, man, just come by whenever. I'll be where I'm at.

RUBEN
(heading off)
Awright, be cool, man.

ALAMIDE
I *am* cool, motherfucker.
(to himself)
I *am* cool.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY BUS TERMINAL - GATES - DAY

BUSES parked at their gates. One bus pulls up. People file off.

Among them, two rattily dressed TEENAGERS carrying backpacks -- OTTO, 19 and NOEL, 17. They look lost, unsure. Otto puts his arm around Noel's neck, reassuringly. They walk off.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - PHONE BOOTH - SAME

Otto YELLS INTO THE PHONE. Noel watches from a distance, hopefully.

He SCREAMS ONE LAST THING into the receiver, BANGS THE PHONE DOWN OVER AND OVER. Defeated, he turns to Noel, shakes his head -- *'No'*.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY - ALLEY - SAME

Otto stands in a DARK DOORWAY with a tall SHADY GUY. He hands the Guy a BAGGIE with WEED. The Guy smells, nods, looks off to his left.

Another SHADEBALL comes up behind Otto, holds a straight razor to his throat.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - SHOP WINDOW - SAME

Noel stares through the window of a DRUG STORE. Watches CUSTOMERS pay for their items at the register. Focuses on the money -- stares hard -- hungry --

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY - ALLEY - SAME

Shady Guy goes through Otto's pockets, pulls out several more pot-filled baggies and some CASH.

He pockets the goods. Gives Otto a PUNCH TO THE HEAD for good measure. Otto goes down as the Shady Guys run off.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - SAME

A bruised and bloodied Otto sits against a wall, arm around a crying Noel. He pulls her close, but she's inconsolable --

-- *TWO MORE LOST KIDS SWALLOWED UP BY THE URBAN JUNGLE.*

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL - DAY

A seedy WELFARE HOTEL. SHADY CHARACTERS loiter outside, drinking from paper bags. Unkempt KIDS run in and out.

Ruben heads up the front steps as two MEN embroiled in a FISTFIGHT tumble into the street. CHRISTINE, 20s, black, attractive, shuffles out in a daze, eyes glazed, STARING UP AT THE SKY. Ruben glances back as he passes her.

RUBEN
Hey, Christine, they comin' down yet?

CHRISTINE
You'll know, asshole...

We FOLLOW HER as she heads outside, staring up at the --

SKY -- TWO MISSILES, small in the distance, DROPPING... DROPPING... out of sight, and suddenly -- a MUSHROOM CLOUD TOWERS OVER THE SKYSCRAPERS -- SKY GOES NUCLEAR RED --

Christine watches events only she can see with frightened awe -- wipes some BROWN POWDER off her nose.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - HALLWAY - SAME

Ruben walks up to a door. Knocks. ABRA, 30, fading beauty, answers. Her 6 year old son, DANNY, cute as hell, runs around behind her. Ruben hands her the bag.

ABRA
Thanks.

DANNY
Ruben.

RUBEN
Hey, little man. Check this out.

Ruben pulls out a small RUBBER SPIDER TOY. Throws it up against the wall. It sticks and appears to CRAWL DOWN. Danny is awed.

DANNY
Ohhh, snap.

RUBEN
All yours.

ABRA
You gotta stop buying him stuff, Ruben, or he'll never learn the word 'No'.

RUBEN
(shrugs)
It was a dollar.

ABRA
Mr. Man's looking for you.

RUBEN
He in his room?

ABRA
Yeah, but Ma Love's with him now.
(yells into room)
Danny, don't touch that iron, honey. It's very hot...

INT. RUBEN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A bed, table, chair and that's about it. Ruben enters, heads for the bed. REACHES UNDER THE MATTRESS and pulls out a LOCKBOX -- UNLOCKS IT. Inside...

ROLLS OF CASH. He pulls more cash from his pocket. Counts it. Pulls a PAD from the box. Adds up the new money with the old. Circles the final figure -- *$ 3, 122.06.*

He pulls a FOLDED PAPER from the box. Unfolds it --

A PHOTO COLLAGE. Pictures of a WOMAN, 30s, smiling, flirtatious. Pics of a MAN, 40s, grinning proudly, standing next to a HORSE. The Woman and a YOUNG CHILD. A MAGAZINE CUTOUT of a RANCH HOUSE, HORSES GRAZING --

IMAGES OF ANOTHER, BETTER LIFE -- Ruben stares, longingly...

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Ruben knocks on a door. Moments later, the door opens revealing MR. MAN, mid-30s. Tall, black. Charisma and confidence personified. A startling presence.

MR. MAN
I'm in the middle of some shit up in here, little man, but I do wanna talk to you.
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
Meet me out the lobby in a half. And don't make me have to come lookin' for your shit.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

A blinking red NEON SIGN shines through the window, flooding the otherwise dusky room. MA LOVE, black, early 30s voluptuous and sexy, sits at the foot of the bed whimpering.

Mr. Man walks in, stands over her, his voice soft, soothing.

MA LOVE
I still can't believe Ro's gone. I prayed that shit, you know? I prayed it.

MR. MAN
Well, *you* my bottom ho now, baby, so you got to sling fish like a Kingfish. Walk that sweet black ass down the ho stroll, bring your Mr. Man back some serious. 'Cause that's the money gonna get you and me out the game.

MA LOVE
Why you put Ro out though? You was tight.

MR. MAN
Fuck that bitch. She ain't never had no genuine love for me any damn way. But you? You my one and only Ma Love, and you know, baby... you know I need to hear that shit. C'mon now, lemme hear it.

MA LOVE
I love you, baby.

MR. MAN
Baby, you don't even know what that does to me.

MA LOVE
I need to hear it, too.

MR. MAN
Oh, I got a long love for you, baby...

UNBUCKLES HIS BELT --

MR. MAN
... a loooong love...

EXT. STREET - DUSK

Mr. Man -- PIMPED TO THE NINES -- walks with Ruben. Urban decay surrounds them. An easy dynamic between them, like father and son.

MR. MAN
How you doin' on the dream scene, little man? Able to sleep the other night?

RUBEN
Little bit.

MR. MAN
You need anymore that Valium shit, you tell me now. You ain't no good to me half out. I just don't want you get hooked on that shit. Listen...
(beat; sighs)
Ro bust out last middle of the night.

RUBEN
(shocked)
Serious? See, I knew that shit would happen. They're all the fuckin' same.

MR. MAN
They ain't all the same, little man. But they sure as shit all alike.

RUBEN
She go with anyone?

MR. MAN
Anything, she up and left the goddamn state. Better have, shit.

RUBEN
And you treated her good, too.

MR. MAN
Good as I shoulda. But see little man, I can't have no three bitches in my stable, I'm'a actualize this new game shit. You know what I'm talkin' about, right?

RUBEN
Wall Street thing?

MR. MAN
Yeah. Look here.

They stop at a NEWS STAND. Mr. Man pours over the rack, pulls out INVESTOR MONTHLY. Flips to a MERRIL-LYNCH AD showing a TEENAGE GIRL staring up at a starry sky.

MR. MAN
See that?

RUBEN
Yeah.

Flips through. Another PRINT AD -- OLDER MAN, 50s, arm around a smiling TEENAGE GIRL who holds a BANK BOOK --

MR. MAN
And another, and another. This here, little man? This shit's called market research. All them ads in these money magazines, they just like this, 'cause they know that's what most 'a them old, white Wall Street motherfuckers want. Wanna make a little deposit in their daughter's best friend, know what I'm sayin'? They know. Now *I* know. Ro pullin' a rabbit wasn't no less than a blessing in disguise. I don't need another Ro.
(off Ruben's confused look)
Little man, how long you been runnin' for me?

RUBEN
I don't know, like, two years?

MR. MAN
Two years. Shit. Feels like I been lookin' after your shit since you popped out the pussy.
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
I know you ain't earn that much, but you survivin' okay.
(re: Ruben's Walkman)
Got music for ya head. Food. Place to eat, sleep, and shit in.

RUBEN
I'm doin' okay.

MR. MAN
Can't get out the game on 'okay', though.

Ruben shrugs. Mr. Man smiles, leans into him. Conspiring.

MR. MAN
Tonight, you goin' on a talent scout. You bring me like this...
(re: Print Ad)
... something young, new. Some fantasy shit I can break in, just so long as they hungry, and I'll cut you in the new game shit for real. No more 'a this 'make ends meet' bullshit. A *percentage.*

Ruben's eyes light up.

MR. MAN
Yeah, you like that. I told you I'd take care of you. I ain't got the time no more to keep up on the scene, the game I'm'a be runnin'. But I got the plan, little man. And you got me.
(beat)
Year's time, we be ridin' round on that black muh-fuckin' stallion you got your eye on. What's the name?

RUBEN
Damascus.

MR. MAN
Damascus. We go on out the country, ride around, buy a jockey for that shit. Get on away from all this.
(beat; serious)
It's you... and me. Just keep this new game shit to your own self 'til we fully organized, you dig?

Ruben stares up at him with love -- admiration. Nods.

MR. MAN
Awright. I gotta go put the wives down.

Puts his arm around Ruben as they head off.

MR. MAN
Gonna be a long night, little man. That motherfucker Boo back. Been sneakin' 'round Abra last middle of the week, talkin' some shit...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - NIGHT

The BAD ELEMENT is out in full force. COPS patrol to little effect.

Ruben walks among them, stares at different GIRLS. Most of them already worn from years on the street. His eyes betray his heavy heart.

He continues on, joylessly searching...

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

ROLAND, black, 30s, opens his door. Mr. Man, Ma Love and Christine wait. Abra kisses Danny goodbye.

MR. MAN
Mommy see you later, shorty.

As she passes him to Roland, he COUGHS ON CHRISTINE. She pulls back, glares at Danny in disgust.

CHRISTINE
Why he always gotta be coughin' on me? He don't know how to close his goddamn mouth?

Abra shoots her a nasty look. Mr Man POINTS AT ROLAND -- makes a *HEAD ON A PILLOW* GESTURE.

MR. MAN
Ten o'clock. And don't give him no more 'a them pixie stick shits, Roland.

EXT. STREETS - WHITE CADDILAC - NIGHT

Mr. Man drives his girls. Glances out the window at various OLD, WORN OUT PIMPS.

Exhales deeply. Look in his eyes says, *'Won't be me'*.

Lets each of the girls out on DIFFERENT CORNERS --

EXT. EIGHTH AVENUE - NIGHT

Ruben prowls the street, looking for *HER*. Passes RUBBER MAN, an old guy with a CART FULL OF CONDOMS AND COSMETICS.

RUBBER MAN
(happily chanting)
Rubbers, rubbers, prophylactics, condoms, jimmy hats and skins. Lipstick, blush, mascara, makeup, everything to hide your sins. The Rubber Man.

A couple of HOOKERS sidle up to him with cash.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Ma Love walks into the SEEDY ROOM with SOLDIER BOY, 30s, dressed in ARMY FATIGUES.

MA LOVE
You follow rules in the Army?

SOLDIER BOY
Yes, ma'am.

MA LOVE
Ma'am. I like that. Respectful soldier boy. Well, I got some rules too, baby. No fingers, can't kiss my titties, can't kiss *me*, no doggy-style, no greek. Don't mean we can't have fun. Cool?

Soldier Boy reaches into his pocket, pulls out a TOOTHPICK --

MA LOVE
What's that for?

EXT. 11TH AVENUE - NIGHT

CLOSE on A PAIR OF BLOODSHOT EYES --

-- WATCHING ABRA from across the street as she talks to another HOOKER. We see bits and pieces of the guy they belong to --

-- NEEDLE-MARKED ARM -- CIGARETTE between DRY, SWOLLEN LIPS -- PASTY SKIN -- a GHOST TATTOO -- a TREMBLING HAND --

VOICE
(under his breath)
... C, cat, D, dog, E... E, eel... F... F... F-f-faggot... Fuck... F, FOX... F, fox... I know it... I got it... I know it... I got it...

Crosses the street toward Abra.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Ma Love watches Solder Boy recited his tearful story while he STANDS AT ATTENTION, holding up the toothpick.

SOLDIER BOY
We stood there, balls hanging down to the mud, guns at the back of our heads, while three VC hot-tails with skeeter-bit titties marched around in front of us, licking their lips, bending over, giving us the fuck me eyes. VC General pulls out one of these, says anyone gotta hard-on'd get a toothpick down his piss hole.

EXT. 11TH AVENUE - SAME

BOO of the blood-shot eyes, mid-30s, drug-thin and jumpy, WEAVES THROUGH TRAFFIC -- CHANTING --

BOO
... R, rodent, S, salamander... I know it... I got it... T, turkey... motherfuckin' jiiiiiiive turkey...
(approaching Abra)
Abra-cadabra, I'm'unna reach out and grab ya.

ABRA
Aw, shit.

BOO
(to other hooker)
Hey, Butter Sweet. Butter Sweet-teet-teeties. Tweet-tweet. Ready to talk bidnezzzz, princezzzz?

BUTTER SWEET gives him a disgusted look, heads off.

BOO
Abracadabra. How's my Danny Banany?

ABRA
I don't work for you no more, Boo. My peoples come around here, see you --

BOO
My peoples -- my PEEP-HOLES? He's my son too, bitch. *My* seed. My seedy-weedy, sweetie.

MR. MAN (O.C.)
Hey, motherfucker...

Boo turns. Sees Mr. Man's Caddy pulling up to the curb.

BOO
I wanna see my boy, cunty.

Boo takes off. The Caddy follows.

Suddenly, a LIMO pulls up to Abra. BACK WINDOW ROLLS DOWN. The PASSENGER, attractive male, 30s, peaks his head out. Makes eye contact with her.

INT. PORNO SHOP - SAME

Boo walks past rows of PORNOS and SEX TOYS, past the COUNTERMAN.

COUNTERMAN
He's in the back.
(under his breath)
Fuckin' nut.

INT. BACK ROOM - SAME

Boo walks through the BEADED ENTRANCE to the small room. Shelves lined with books, mags, movies. DAMON, white, 30s, puts magazines in sleeves and stacks them.

BOO
Da-mon-mon-money man. I can't get near my kid. My own pretty kiddie.

DAMON
Dunno what to tell you.

BOO
Guy in D.C still offering the same?

DAMON
How old's your kid again?

BOO
Six. Six, six, six, six...

DAMON
Yeah, twelve, fifteen-hundred a shoot. D.C, man. Big demand for this kinda shit in that town.

Damon picks up a MAGAZINE, throws it at Boo. The COVER -- KIDS, no more than nine or ten, some scared, some attempting to look alluring. The title -- *HOT TOTS*.

DAMON
Your own kid though, man. I don't know how you can do that shit.

BOO
Twelve, fifteen-hundred a shoot? I'd put my own little puddy out to stud, buddy.

EXT. EIGHTH AVENUE - SAME

Ruben continues his search. RUNAWAY KIDS all over. Comes to the PORT AUTHORITY BUS TERMINAL. Heads inside.

EXT. STREET CORNER - SAME

Christine on her corner, waiting. Sees two familiar BLINKING HEADLIGHTS across the street. Smiles. Crosses.

INT. LIMO - SAME

Abra and the Passenger toast with two glasses of wine. The DRIVER peeks into the back through his REARVIEW.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SAME

Soldier Boy goes on, barely audible through tears --

SOLDIER BOY
I was the only one didn't get hard that day, ma'am. You gotta get me up and stick it in. I wanna feel it. I shoulda shared their pain.

MA LOVE
That's a main vein, baby. Ma Love'll get you hard, but she don't do no woodwork.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - MAIN TERMINAL - NIGHT

Ruben walks through the terminal scoping out the myriad RUNAWAYS and JUNKIES. Suddenly sees --

NOEL

A standout in this human wasteland. She's obscenely out of place. He FOLLOWS HER. She reaches Otto and they kiss.

Ruben stares. Beauty. Youth. Innocence. *SHE'S THE ONE.*

INT. CENTRAL PARK - SAME

The LIMO pulls into a SECLUDED PLACE. Comes to a stop.

INT. LIMO - SAME

Abra puts down her wine. The Passenger glances outside.

ABRA
I don't do kink, baby. No bushes.

PASSENGER
Wouldn't dream of it. I'm just gonna go take a piss real quick, 'at's all.
(MORE)

PASSENGER (cont'd)
Don't you move that sweet little ass an inch. I'll be back directly.

ABRA
Your dime, your time, honey.

He exits. Suddenly, from the front of the car --

LIMO DRIVER
Hey, psst...

She turns and sees... the Driver's got a GUN on her.

ABRA
Aw, fuck. You gotta be kidding me.

LIMO DRIVER
You wanna be another dead whore? Keep your cock-hole shut and gimme whatever you got in your panties.

ABRA
Please. I got a kid.

LIMO DRIVER
Gimme a fuckin' break. Panties.

Abra reaches in her panties, pulls out a WAD OF BILLS.

ABRA
I'll give you the money, you promise not to shoot me.

LIMO DRIVER
You'll give me the money, any --

SMASH!!!

A HAND with a WRAPAROUND CHAIN CRASHES THROUGH THE DRIVER'S WINDOW. The startled Driver is YANKED FROM THE CAR.

Abra jumps out, sees Mr. Man beating the Driver bloody.

ABRA
There's another one in the bushes.

MR. MAN
He asleep.

Driver unconscious, Mr. Man finds his wallet. Pulls out the CASH. Pockets it. Checks his watch.

MR. MAN
Bitch, what I tell you 'bout gettin' in a limo?

INT. PLUSH HOTEL SUITE -- LIVING ROOM AREA - NIGHT

Very upscale. Christine sits on a couch. MILTON KLEIN, a well-dressed gentleman in his 40s, brings her a drink.

CHRISTINE
When you gonna introduce me to your friends, Mr. Klein?

KLEIN
You read the times, Christine? Know anything about the market?

CHRISTINE
I read the Post. You know they got nuclear missiles aimed right here at New York?

KLEIN
(chuckles)
I made a lot of money with options last year, Christine. The DMC -- small investment, pennies, always on margin. Then the most beautiful thing, almost as beautiful as you. The Dakota Multinational merger. And now...
(sings)
Everytime it rains it rains/
Pennies from heaven...
(beat; hesitant)
Will you... do that thing tonight Christine?

CHRISTINE
The thing your wife won't do on you?

KLEIN
You're the only one who really knows me.
(starts caressing her)
I've decided to keep you all to myself. Mmm, better this way. My sweet black secret treat. I feel so free with you. Now, why don't you have a little something... to get us started.

He motions to the COFFEE TABLE -- STACKED WITH FOOD --

EXT. POSH HOTEL - LATER

Klein waits by the entrance as the VALET pulls his car out.

CLOSE on MR. MAN

Watching from his Caddy across the street. Klein's car pulls out. Mr. Man follows.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - NIGHT

Mr. Man's Caddy follows Klein's BLACK MERCEDES.

EXT. BROOKLYN HEIGHTS - STREET - NIGHT

Klein's car pulls into the garage of a TOWNHOUSE.

INT. CADDY - SAME

Parked, Mr. Man watches the Townhouse from a safe distance. Flips on the car light -- WRITES DOWN THE ADDRESS --

INT. RUBEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Illuminated by moonlight. Horns and screaming from the street below fill the room.

Ruben lays on the bed -- HEADPHONES ON -- MUSIC DROWNING OUT THE CITY NOISE. He stares hard at the PHOTO COLLAGE. Focuses on the WOMAN.

FLASH CUT:

Woman in the picture. Screaming, crying, terrified.

WOMAN
I'm sorry... please, don't... I love you...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
... YOU ONLY LOVE YOURSELF... WHORE... YOU DID THIS...

GUNSHOTS -- BULLETS HIT HER CHEST --

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
... forgive me...

CLOSE on the MAN'S MOUTH

As the GUN is inserted into it. The HAMMER IS COCKED -- BOOM! The gunshot reverberates --

BACK TO:

INT. RUBEN'S ROOM - PRESENT

Ruben turns up the music, stares at the picture of the Woman... his eyes dampen...

INT. CADDY - NIGHT

Mr. Man reaches into the passenger seat where a SMALL PILE OF BOOKS lay scattered. Titles like *THE GOSPEL OF WEALTH* and *CREATIVE VISUALIZATION*. Grabs one.

THINK & GROW RICH -- Flips to a chapter -- *ORGANIZED PLANNING: The Crystallization of Desire Into Action.*

Lights a long, brown CIGARILLO, settles in for a night of reading...

FADE TO:

INT. CADDY - DAWN

The early morning light filters in. Mr. Man is still awake, still reading. Looks up at KLEIN'S MERCEDES coming out of the garage. Mr. Man starts his engine. Follows.

INT. KLEIN'S CAR - BROOKLYN BRIDGE - SAME

Fresh, attentive and alone, Klein munches Danish, listens to FINANCIAL NEWS on the radio as he crosses the bridge.

RADIO
... the Dow went up another hundred and fifty-seven points in heavy trading yesterday...

EXT. WALL STREET - MORNING

To establish. SUITS with SUITCASES. RUSHING CROWDS. The STOCK EXCHANGE. FURIOUS ACTIVITY.

INT. CADDY - SAME

Mr. Man watches Klein pull into a SKYSCRAPER GARAGE.

INT. SKYSCRAPER - LOBBY - SAME

Mr. Man, out of place in his flashy Pimp Threads, scans the BUSINESS DIRECTORY. Finds LOMPOC & KLEIN INVESTMENTS.

Notices the SECURITY GUARD eyeing him suspiciously. Mr. Man TIPS HIS FEATHERED HAT to the Guard. Exits.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Mr. Man and Ruben walk down the street.

MR. MAN
You been growin'?

RUBEN
Nah, I can't grow no more.

MR. MAN
Yes you can, little man. You grow on up into your twenties. I think you gone up an inch. Shit. Pretty soon I can't call you 'little man' no more.

RUBEN
You think... really?

MR. MAN
Don't go gettin' taller than me now.

RUBEN
I won't.

MR. MAN
I won't. Shit, you could be a comedian, Ruben.

Puts his arm around Ruben, gives him a squeeze.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - MAIN TERMINAL - DAY

Mr. Man and Ruben walk through the MAIN TERMINAL. Ruben points at Otto in the distance, begging for change.

RUBEN
That's her friend. She should be around somewhere. There.

Points her out. Mr. Man sees Noel. He's pleased.

MR. MAN
Yeah, I see what you mean. You done good, little man. I'm proud of you.

RUBEN
He might be a problem.

MR. MAN
Ain't no problem can't be solved.

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

CHINESE GUY pulls a LOCKED BOX out of a SAFE -- OPENS IT -- LOTTA CASH!

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
Ain't nothin' you can't have.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - SAME

Alamide watches the Chinese guy leave the store. He follows.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
Drops, man. Hit him on a Monday, you can get the Friday, Saturday *and* Monday loot. Maybe even Sunday.

EXT. DOORWAY - SAME

Alamide CLICKS his knife open and forces the Chinese Guy into the doorway. Chinese Guy cowers at the knife's touch.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
Gun ain't shit compared to a knife. K-55 with the four inch blade?
(MORE)

ALAMIDE (V.O.) (cont'd)
You feel that point in your side, just could maybe break the skin but not? You know that shit's real.

Alamide takes the box --

EXT. CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Alamide looks at the WINDOW DISPLAY. Parachute pants.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
Rules of the street? You got to live for the day. Money ain't always be comin' in. Gotta be a slave, 'least do it on your own terms. Bet.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Grandmaster Flash's *The Message* plays. BREAKDANCERS form a circle, taking turns in the middle.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
Everybody got a dream. You got yours and I got mine, and together we'll be fine.

Alamide bursts into the middle WEARING HIS NEW PARACHUTE PANTS. Starts doing the Windmill.

INT. ALAMIDE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Alamide sits on the couch playing ATARI with his girlfriend DAPHNE, white, 20s. New GAME CARTRIDGES sit on the coffee table, along with DRUG PARAPHERNALIA.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
Still, too much fresh new shit comin' out all the time. Wha'm I gonna do? I need the fast green, I go street-side.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

People rushing here and there. Alamide walks among them.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
Mugging, man. It's an art in itself. I don't perpetrate no violence, though.
(MORE)

ALAMIDE (V.O.) (cont'd)
Too noisy, too much movement.
(an OLD MAN passes)
No old timers, neither. Old Time might have a bad heart, drop dead, that's murder one right there. Mugging just robbery and assault. Easier to beat.

A SHIFTY-EYED MAN passes. Alamide follows.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
It's them dudes keep lookin' around, all suspicious and shit, eyes in the back of their heads? They got the money.

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

Alamide's cornered the Shifty-Eyed Man. People occasionally pass and peak into the alley but do nothing.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
And you gotta hit that shit during the day. People doing their thing, goin' 'bout their business. Number one, they ain't expecting it, and number two, ain't nobody want to get involved. But I ain't even gonna do this shit forever, man.

EXT. EMPTY STOREFRONT - DAY

Alamide stands in front, peeks inside. A BIG SPACE WITH WOODEN FLOORS.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
Pretty soon, that one big sting come along, put all this shit in perspective.

He lights a smoke, heads down the street.

ALAMIDE (V.O.)
Meantime, gotta be cool. Keep movin'.

CUT TO:

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - MAIN TERMINAL - DAY

OTTO
Keep moving...

Otto and Noel speed-walk through the terminal, nervously, as a HOMELESS MAN follows, ranting and raving at them.

Suddenly, SIEGE, a big scary dude, bumps into Otto, followed by his two FRIENDS. Siege stops. CHECKS HIS POCKETS.

SIEGE
Motherfucker...

Siege and Friends run back to Otto and Noel, block their way.

SIEGE
You best gimme back my motherfuckin' wallet 'fore I fuck you up, bitch.

FRIEND #1
Fuck 'im up anyway, man.

OTTO
I don't know what you're talking about, man.

They try to pass them. No dice. Siege grabs Otto by the shirt.

SIEGE
Lyin' motherfucker...

Suddenly, a hand grabs Siege's shoulder. It's Mr. Man.

MR. MAN
Yo Siege, whatchoo doin', man? Why you scarin' these kids?

SIEGE
Fuck outta here, Mr. Man. This ain't got nothin' to do with you.

Mr. Man SLAPS HIM IN THE FACE.

MR. MAN
Who the fuck you think you talkin' to, boy? You better tell me what the fuck you doin' and fast, nigga.

OTTO
Fuckin' guy says I stole his wallet. He comes up, grabs me, he's scarin' my girlfriend.

SIEGE
Nigga rolled me, man. Bump inna me, next thing I know, my wallet ain't in my back pocket.

OTTO
That's bullshit.

Siege jumps at Otto. Mr. Man pulls them apart.

MR. MAN
'nough a this shit.
(to Noel)
You alright, young lady?

NOEL
(shaken up)
Yeah.

MR. MAN
Awright. We gonna resolve this the Martin Luther motherfuckin' King way. What your wallet look like?

SIEGE
Black velcro, got a picture of Mr. T look like B.A Baracus on'a front.

MR. MAN
(to Otto)
You mind? I'm just tryin' to help you out.

Otto puts his arms out. Mr. Man pats him down and pulls the black velcro WALLET from his jacket pocket.

SIEGE
Lyin' motherfucker.

OTTO
I didn't take that.

NOEL
Jesus, Otto...

OTTO
He put it there. You put it there.

NOEL
Why would he put it there?

Mr. Man hands the wallet back to Siege.

MR. MAN
You gotcha wallet back, Siege. Whyn't you leave 'em alone? They just tryin' to make their way.

SIEGE
(to Otto)
Lucky. I'll see you again though. Bet.

Siege and Friends leave.

OTTO/NOEL
Thanks... thank you...

MR. MAN
That's alright. You best be careful you don't roll the wrong man, though. I ain't likely be around all the time. Must need the money pretty bad, you doin' that.

OTTO
Yeah, but I swear to God, I didn't -

MR. MAN
You one brave kid, stand up to Siege like that, yeah.
(thinks; then)
Tell me something. When's the last time you seen a crisp clean twenty dollar bill?

Mr. Man holds out a folded PAPER BAG.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - MINUTES LATER

Otto comes up the ESCALATOR. Heads for the BOWLING ALLEY. Approaches FRANKLIN, at the entrance. Holds out the bag.

OTTO
Mr. Man says I'm s'posed to give you this.

FRANKLIN
You look inside?

Otto shakes his head. They EXCHANGE BAGS. Otto walks off. Franklin opens his, pulls out a black, leather SKINNY TIE.

FRANKLIN
(excited)
Yeeeeaaaahhhh, motherfucker...

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - ARBY'S - SAME

Mr. Man sits in a booth staring down into the paper bag, across from Otto and Noel, who ravenously eat their food.

MR. MAN
You did good, little man. Proud of you.

OTTO
Thanks for the money.

MR. MAN
Shit, you earned it. I can't be makin' no exchanges, known as I am.

NOEL
What're you exchanging?

MR. MAN
You wanna know what's in the bag?

Mr. Man opens it up, turns it toward them. Otto's eyes light up.

OTTO
Holy shit.

MR. MAN
The holiest.

OTTO
How much is that?

MR. MAN
Don't know. Got to weigh it.

NOEL
What're you gonna do with it?

MR. MAN
Turn white to green, young lady.

OTTO
How? I mean, do you sell it off a little at a time, cut it up yourself, or --?

MR. MAN
Damn, you a regular Curious George. Well, lemme tell you something might be of genuine concern to you and your ladyfriend, Curious. Siege, motherfucker whose wallet you boosted? I'm sad to say, he gonna come lookin' for your ass again. He got a elephant brain when it come to shit like this.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY - DAY

Ruben, Siege and his Friends stand outside.

SIEGE
Me and Mr. Man awright now, right?

RUBEN
Yeah, man.

SIEGE
Awright. Be cool, Ruben.

He heads off.

RUBEN
I *am* cool, motherfucker. I am cool.

INT. ARBY'S - DAY

Otto's insistent.

OTTO
I swear, I didn't take the guy's wallet. He was tryin' to start shit. I don't know what.

MR. MAN
Did, didn't. Don't make no difference. Siege, he was in five years for rapin' a metermaid tried to give his ass a jay-walkin' ticket. A metermaid, man.
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
That's some antisocial shit. You got someplace you can go?

OTTO
I'm working on it.

MR. MAN
Two kids like you, they whole lives ahead of 'em. Fulla promise and shit.

OTTO
We can go down, sleep at Grand Central if we have to. Or Penn Station.

MR. MAN
That's no good, man. Siege work those places every day. Tell you what, I know a place I can put you up while we figure out what you gonna do next. Cause I don't need this shit on my conscience. Whatchoo say?

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - MAIN TERMINAL - SAME

Ruben watches Mr. Man, Otto and Noel from outside Arby's. They merrily slap Mr. Man five. Everybody getting along.

CUT TO:

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - ROOM - DAY

The room is sparse. Noel stretches out on the bed. Otto sits on the water heater, staring out the window.

NOEL
It's better than sleeping against a wall.

OTTO
Everything's gonna be better now. This guy, he says he can maybe put me to work. Something to start us off.

NOEL
Do you trust him?

He walks to her. Takes her face in his hands.

OTTO
We'll be safe here.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Christine, Ma Love and Abra, holding Danny's hand, walk. Danny keeps stepping on Christine's foot.

CHRISTINE
He steps on my foot one more time, I'm'a smack the little bastard.

Abra pulls Danny around the other side of her, away from Christine.

ABRA
That's why Jesus won't let you have one.

CHRISTINE
(seriously offended)
Fuck you say?

CLOSE ON BOO

Watching them argue from across the street.

Ma Love pulls Christine away from Abra and into a CLOTHING STORE. Abra and Danny stay outside, checking out a STREET VENDOR'S wares.

INT. CLOTHING STORE - SAME

Christine and Ma Love pull clothes off the racks.

CHRISTINE
What you really think happen to Ro?

MA LOVE
Mr. Man kicked her ass out.

CHRISTINE
Why though? She was makin' more money than all of us.

MA LOVE
He just tired of her raggedy ass. Ain't always about money.

CHRISTINE
Mr. Man, it is.

MA LOVE
You don't know what you talkin' 'bout, so just shut the fuck up 'fore I shut you up, THC snortin' bitch.

The MANAGER and SALES GIRL watch them, nervously.

EXT. CLOTHING STORE - SAME

Abra and a delighted Danny stare at the Street Vendor, who DEMONSTRATES A FROG PUPPET, complete with fly-catching tongue.

STREET VENDOR
... and the tongue goes zap and catches the fly, mmm, and eats the fly...

CUT TO:

ACROSS THE STREET

Boo watches. Imitates the frog puppet with his tongue for his own amusement.

INT. CLOTHING STORE - SAME

Ma Love grows furious as she and Christine argue.

CHRISTINE
Just 'cause she gone don't mean he *your* man now.

MA LOVE
I ain't gon' listen to you shoot your junky-ass mouth off...

Ma Love smacks Christine in the face with a hanger. They fight. The Store Manager picks up the phone, dials.

EXT. STREET - SAME

Boo starts to cross toward Abra and Danny.

BOO
... O, orange, P, peach... I know it, I got it...

Suddenly, a POLICE CAR rounds the corner. Stops in front of the clothing store. Boo curses, heads in the other direction.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ma Love lies on her stomach on the bed as Mr. Man BEATS HER BARE BACK WITH A WIRE HANGER. She screams and cries.

MR. MAN
Make me bail your ass out. Fuck up everything I be workin' so hard for. Why you make me do this when I love you?

INT. CHRISTINE'S ROOM - SAME

Christine dumps some BROWN POWDER on her wrist from a baggie. Tilts her head back revealing a fresh BLACK EYE. Snorts the powder hard.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

Ma Love lies naked and sobbing on the bed as Mr. Man gently rubs her bruised back down with alcohol.

MR. MAN
You know this a family, right? And you don't start no shit with family, 'cause they all you got.

MA LOVE
I didn't mean it. Please don't hate me.

He lifts her off the bed, carries her into the --

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

-- lowers her into the tub, which slowly fills.

MR. MAN
Scrub down clean now, baby. We gotta go feed the family.

He turns around, exits, leaving her to soak. She cries.

MA LOVE
... don't hate me...

FADE TO:

INT. LOMPOC & KLEIN INVESTMENTS - RECEPTION - DAY

A female RECEPTIONIST busily answers incoming calls. Mr. Man enters, strolls up to her, coolly.

RECEPTIONIST
Can I help you?

MR. MAN
I'm here to see Mr. Klein.

RECEPTIONIST
And your name is?

MR. MAN
Mr. Man.

She checks her appointment sheet.

RECEPTIONIST
I'm sorry, sir, who are you with?

MR. MAN
Right now I'm with you.

RECEPTIONIST
Mr. Klein doesn't see walk-ins. You'll need to schedule an appointment for sometime next month.

She answers a ringing phone. Mr. Man reaches over the desk, CUTS OFF THE CALL.

RECEPTIONIST
Excuse me. What do you think you're --?

MR. MAN
Young lady, I represent one of Mr. Klein's most personal domestic interests. Now, you just call him on up, tell him this in regards to Christine. He'll wanna see me.

INT. KLEIN'S OFFICE - SAME

Enormous office with a view of downtown Manhattan. Klein stands, sober-faced, at the open door. Mr. Man walks in, extends his hand.

MR. MAN
How you doin', Mr. Klein?

KLEIN
(doesn't shake)
What're you, Christine's pimp? I always paid her in full. What the hell do you mean coming down to my office?

MR. MAN
You mind I have a seat?

He strolls behind Klein's desk. Sits in the reclining leather chair. Stretches back.

KLEIN
You gonna tell me what this is about?

MR. MAN
You have yourself a seat, too, Mr. Klein. We'll get down to it.

Klein sits uncomfortably in the Client's chair. Mr. Man notices a large PAINTING adorning a wall.

MR. MAN
Who painted that shit?

KLEIN
Mark Rothko.

MR. MAN
He a real artist or's he like your nephew or something? 'Cause I could do something simple like that, shit...

KLEIN
He's a very famous abstract expressionist.
(beat; impatient)
I'm meeting a client in ten minutes.

MR. MAN
Right. You all business. I respect that, Mr. Klein, so I won't waste anymore of your valuable time. Pimp, shit. Pimp's an ugly word, used by uneducated go-nowhere niggas with something to prove. Me? I'm more of a personal manager. You and me, we not that different. I do know what you Jew do, Mr. Milton "Investment Banker" Klein. You find the money, find the talent, bring 'em together, make even more money. I do that, too. 'Course, I'm a *self*-educated motherfucker. But I do know shit, and motherfuckers that know shit always want more. I ain't no pimp, Mr. Klein, I'm a personal manager. I handle Christine's portfolio, and I don't need to tell you, that bitch is into some versatile shit. For example, here's just one of the many services the lovely and talented Christine provides...

Mr. Man pulls a small stack of 8x10 PHOTOS from his satchel, hands them to Klein.

KLEIN
What is this?

MR. MAN
That's Christine takin' a massive crap on some smiling motherfucker looks a lot like you, Mr. Klein.

KLEIN
(going through photos)
Jesus God.

MR. MAN
Yeah, it's astonishing, isn't it? How so much shit can come outta such a little itty-bitty thing? They say some animals crap three times they own body weight. I read that someplace. National Geographic, some shit.

Klein starts to cry.

MR. MAN
Hey now, don't cry, baby. You ain't even heard my game yet.

KLEIN
I have a family.

MR. MAN
Yeah, that's another thing we got in common. We birds of a muh-fuckin' feather, Mr. Klein.

KLEIN
What do you want?

MR. MAN
Offer you a mutually beneficial business proposition. That's all, that's it, and ain't that some shit. Far as I'm concerned, ain't nobody need to see the real down and dirty Klein long as we both shall live.

KLEIN
I'm listening.

MR. MAN
Yeah, I believe you are. You a smart and prosperous man, Mr. Klein. An educated man. Pillar of the business community. You *know* shit. Shit, you wouldn't have all this if you didn't. And you know a lot of *other* motherfuckers that know shit. And motherfuckers that know shit always want more. You coulda had Christine any damn way you liked, but you chose gettin' grumpied on. Now I ain't judgin' your shit, that's God's business. My business is knowin' your particular preference ain't that of the average blue collar missionary motherfucker. And I'll just bet you got a lotta clients and associates who deviate in your general direction, but ain't got no nowhere to satisfy they urges. That's where I come in. I'm'a be settin' up some parties up there in the Barbizon Hotel up on Lexington. You know it?

KLEIN
Yes.

MR. MAN
I'm'a bring the talent, you gon' bring the money, we don't never have to speak of this shit again. Now I don't need your answer right away. You meditate on that shit. Look around you, think about what you got to lose. I'm a sensitive motherfucker. I know I dumped a whole lotta *lotta* on your shit, so I'm'a give you a couple days to realize. And just in case you get some idea 'bout tryin' to rub my shit out, best you know, I ain't the only one with your address.
(beat)
You have a good day now, Mr. Klein. I'll be in touch.

Mr. Man collects his things, heads for the door, exits. Klein breaks down crying as his SECRETARY'S VOICE on the INTERCOM fills the room.

INTERCOM
Mr. Klein, your one o'clock is here.
(beat)
Mr. Klein... ?

CUT TO:

INT. STREET - DAY

Mr. Man walks with Otto, pointing out corners.

MR. MAN
I'm'unna put you out on the street, you gotta know what you puttin' out. Them niggas cop off you, they gonna wanna make sure you know your game, dig? I'm'a show you how to fix, I'm'a trust you with my shit. Whatchoo gon' do for me?

OTTO
Go out, make us some money?

MR. MAN
That's my boy.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - HALLWAY - SAME

Ruben walks through the hall. Comes to a door. Swallows nervously, knocks.

NOEL (O.C.)
Who is it?

RUBEN
Ruben. I'm a friend of Mr. Man's.

Noel opens the door. Ruben stares at her.

NOEL
Where's Otto?

RUBEN
He's upstairs talking to Mr. Man.

NOEL
Oh.

RUBEN
Yeah. Anyway, I'm Ruben.

NOEL
Noel.

RUBEN
Nice to meet you.

NOEL
Yeah, you too.

RUBEN
Yeah. So anyway, I kind of do little things around here for Mr. Man's friends.

NOEL
What do you mean?

RUBEN
Like if you need anything, and you can't get it, you come upstairs, 502, tell me what you need, I'll go get it for you.

NOEL
Like what kinda things?

RUBEN
I don't know. Like right now I'm going to get this lady Abra a grilled cheese.

NOEL
Who's Abra?

RUBEN
She lives in the hotel. She's one of Mr. Man's friends. Associates.

NOEL
Associates.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

Mr. Man COOKS THE HEROIN while Otto takes the belt from his pants, ties it around his arm.

Otto flexes and a vein pops out. Mr. Man hands him the needle. Otto slowly brings it to his vein.

INT. HALLWAY - NOEL'S DOOR - SAME

Ruben and Noel continue to talk.

RUBEN
You want anything from the deli? Food, cigarettes?

NOEL
I don't have any money on me.

RUBEN
Oh no, don't worry about it.

NOEL
(beat; thinks)
I guess I could use a pack of cigarettes.

RUBEN
Okay, cool.

NOEL
You're just gonna buy it for me?

RUBEN
Pack of cigarettes? Yeah, that's a couple bucks. No big deal.

NOEL
Cool. Thanks.

RUBEN
You wanna sandwich? Or a drink or something? It's pretty much lunchtime.

NOEL
What kinda sandwich?

RUBEN
I dunno. What do you like? Turkey?

NOEL
Yeah, I like turkey. On white bread?

RUBEN
Okay, but, y'know, I'll get you whatever, but just to tell you that white bread isn't really good for you 'cause I read somewhere they bleach it, 'cause it doesn't start out that color, so...

NOEL
Serious?

RUBEN
Yeah, it's kinda fucked up...

NOEL
Shit. Okay, then turkey on whatever. You pick.

RUBEN
Really? Okay, cool.

NOEL
Thanks... Ruben.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

The contents of the needle plunge into Otto's vein. He feels it immediately. Mr. Man watches and smiles.

OTTO
Holy shit.

Mr. Man takes the needle as Otto slumps back on the bed.

MR. MAN
The holiest.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Otto makes VARIOUS DRUG DEALS.

INT. OTTO'S ROOM - DAY

Otto looks around the room, searching. Noel puts her arms around him. He kisses her quick, pushes her away.

Finds his needle and junk in a bottom drawer. Prepares to fix.

INT. CADDY - DAY

Mr. Man sits in the parked car, reading his book: ***The Business of America is Business.*** Underlines passages.

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL - DAY

Abra, Danny, Ruben and Noel stand on the front steps talking. Danny runs up to Noel, wraps himself around her leg.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Otto and Mr. Man exchange cash. Mr. Man steals a glance at Otto's arm. Track marks.

INT. OTTO'S ROOM - DAY

Otto pulls out drawers and turns over furniture, desperately searching. He screams at Noel, flings a lamp at her.

INT. MR. MAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Man opens the front door. Noel is there with a split lip. He takes her hand. Gently guides her inside.

FADE TO:

INT. OTTO'S ROOM - DAY

Mr. Man enters. It's a mess -- overturned drawers, mattress, vomit, flies. Otto lies curled up in a fetal ball in a corner of the room, half-naked, gaunt, wasting away.

OTTO
I c-c-can't g-g-et up.

MR. MAN
Lookit you, man.

OTTO
N-n-noel...

MR. MAN
She's okay. You split her lip up good, though.

OTTO
(tearing up)
I didn't m-m-mean t-too. I l-l-lov...

MR. MAN
S'okay, little man. Just relax.

OTTO
I'm t-t-too w-weak. P-please. It's b-b-behind the b-bathroom d-d--

MR. MAN
I'm'a take care of you. You know Mr. Man always hook you up.

Mr. Man gathers the heroin, needle, spoon and lighter from behind the bathroom door. Kneels down by Otto, looks at his arm. Too many needle marks.

OTTO
M-m-my t-toes.

MR. MAN
Why you come on out here in the first place, you gon' end up another goddamn junkie?

Otto starts crying and whimpering in junkie pain.

MR. MAN
Don't worry, I'm'a fix you right up, but first you gotta tell me... Whatchoo been runnin' from?

Otto continues to whimper.

MR. MAN
C'mon now.

OTTO
N-noel. Her st-st-step-f-father... please, it h-h-urts so m-much...

Mr. Man injects the heroin into his toes.

MR. MAN
Tell me.

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL - DAY

Mr. Man and Ruben walk out and head up the street.

INT. OTTO'S ROOM - DAY

Otto lies on the bed, staring up at the ceiling, belt tied tight around his leg, needle and spoon beside him.

The DOOR IS KICKED IN. Four COPS rush the room. They stand over him, pull him up off the bed. He's dazed, oblivious.

One Cop throws a large bag of BROWN POWDER to another. They handcuff Otto, who foams at the mouth, and drag him out.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Mr. Man and Ruben walk briskly.

RUBEN
He's gonna mention your name when he comes to.

MR. MAN
Ain't nothin' connect me to that shit, little man. They ain't no DEA and I ain't runnin' no shooting gallery.

RUBEN
What if they do come to you?

MR. MAN
Then I'm the coolest motherfucker this side the ice age, baby. Squared-up, far as they concerned. Got pay stubs from 'Ole Indian Head Shop, shit, same time that unfortunate motherfucker get possession with intent, I be gettin' unemployment checks.

Ruben stares up at him in admiration. Mr. Man pulls a curled up PAPER BAG from inside his jacket. Hands it to Ruben.

MR. MAN
Bring that on down to Mr. Church, after we done up in here, little man. And say hi to Damascus for me..

They approach a a large dive SELF-SERVE CAFETERIA. Through the glass, Abra sits at a table inside, comforting a distraught Noel. Mr. Man smiles as he and Ruben enter.

INT. CAFETERIA - SAME

Mr. Man and Ruben sit across from Abra and Noel.

MR. MAN
I presented him with a business opportunity, put him on the risks involved, everything. Even told him, 'You sit on the H-bomb, sooner or later that shit's gon' go off.'

NOEL
(sobbing)
What am I supposed to do now? I don't know what to do, where to go...

MR. MAN
(to Ruben)
Little man, whyn't you run down the Optimo, grab me up a pack of Kools. I ain't hip to this Salem shit they got up in here, cool?

Ruben nods. Noel smiles up at him as he leaves. Mr. Man holds out some money for Abra.

MR. MAN
And baby, whyn't you look in on Danny.
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
That *Million Dollar Movie* Kung Fu shit gon' rot his brain. Buy him a book or a magazine. *Highlights,* shit they keep at the dentist.

ABRA
(to Noel)
Maybe you come by later? Danny was asking about you.

NOEL
'kay.

Abra kisses her on the cheek, takes the money. Leaves.

MR. MAN
Yeah, you like Danny. They so curious at that age. Mind's like a sponge. Soak up whatever you put in front of it. Best thing to fill it with everything good.
(beat; leans in)
You feel like you alone, don't you?
(silence)
Talk to me, baby. Tha's why I'm here for. I'm a good listener. C'mon now. You feel like you alone?

NOEL
I knew something like this was gonna happen... with Otto.

MR. MAN
Yeah, I think you did. Tell me about it.

EXT. STREET - SAME

Ruben stops at a corner where a COP ON HORSEBACK lets some KIDS pet his HORSE.

COP
... it's okay. He's friendly.

KID
What's his name?

COP
Jacks.

Ruben walks up to the Cop.

RUBEN
He doesn't like that.

COP
Kids pet him all the time.

RUBEN
You see the way his ears are back now? That's a warning sign of aggression, Officer.

COP
I think I know my own horse, kid.

The Kids continue to tickle and pet the horse. Without warning it SNAPS ITS TEETH AT THE KIDS. They jump back. The Cop smacks the horse in the head.

COP
Eh, what the hell's wrong with you?

Ruben glares at the Cop and heads off.

INT. CAFETERIA - SAME

Noel explains...

NOEL
I knew he'd end up on his own stuff. I just never thought it'd be this soon.

MR. MAN
Well, you come to a crossroads in your own life now, baby, and you got some decisions to make.

NOEL
What do you mean?

MR. MAN
Whether not you wanna stay a part 'a this family for one. Abra, Danny, Christine, Ruben. That's my family. Take a train to get to them through me. They all happy; got a roof over they heads, money to spend, fresh threads on they backs, food on they tables. Tha's the American Dream, baby, and they all work hard to feed the family pot.
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
Now I want you to think about this, don't answer me right away, just listen and think about this, okay?

NOEL
... okay...

MR. MAN
I can offer you two things, Noel. Number one: a family who you will love and who will love you back. With the Man who says I will never let anyone bring you anymore pain, and if they do I will see that pain and raise 'em. You seen what these streets done to Otto. That ain't never gonna happen to you, long as you with me. You look me in the eyes and tell me I ain't the real to real.

The INTENSITY OF HIS VOICE and the FIRE IN HIS EYES is effective. He smile, knows he's got a hold on her mind.

MR. MAN
Alright. Number two...

EXT. OPTIMO - SAME

Ruben walks out with two packs of Kools. He echoes Mr. Man's rap out loud to himself.

RUBEN
I'm offering you control. Control of your own self --

INT. CAFETERIA - SAME

MR. MAN
-- 'cause you out on the street alone, the street controls you, and he one unpredictable motherfucker. Now, you ain't gon' like what's comin' next, but I ain't never gonna be less than honest with you. That is, was, and always will be Mr. Man's way. You got something special, yeah. Something every --

INT. ABRA'S ROOM - SAME

Abra watches Danny imitating Kung Fu moves in front of the T.V, as she quietly recites Mr. Man's rap.

ABRA
-- dope pushin', booster, basehead, blueball pimp motherfucker with a dick between his legs --

INT. CAFETERIA - SAME

Mr. Man continues, building to a crescendo.

MR. MAN
-- wanna get a hold of. That's why you run on out here to the mean city in the first damn place. Somebody you *can't* control takes that shit without askin', and maybe your Mama, she don't believe you, so what you gon' do? You just a baby.

NOEL
How did you --?

MR. MAN
Tellin' you, baby, that shit's gonna happen again. You out on the street alone, nobody lookin' out for you, no family cares about you, some crazy motherfucker take what he wants, then kill you so you don't tell nobody. And shit, even if you could, who you got to tell? The po-lice? Motherfuckers put you right back where you came from, be like freedom was some beautiful dream, but your eyes they been sewn open. Unless...
(beat)
Unless. Gotta survive out here on these streets, somebody gonna take it anyway, why shouldn't you be the one in control, baby? Kinda money you'd make? Turn them nightmares to gold. Buy any dream you want. Believe it, conceive it, achieve it. Answer me one question, Noel. What's your dream?
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
You could have anything in the world, what's that one thing gonna be?

NOEL
(thinks; then)
I just wanna feel safe.

Mr. Man LAYS HIS OPEN HAND ON THE TABLE.

NOEL
But I don't think I could ever, y'know, do what they do. Abra, Christine...

MR. MAN
I ain't never force you to do anything you don't wanna. But you take my open hand right here, baby, and I promise you... you be safe for the rest of your days.

... and she does. His hand, twice the size of hers. He cups it with his other hand as...

Ruben enters with the smokes. Walks up and sets them on the table. Noel looks up at him, smiles as Ruben places a pack of cigs in front of her.

EXT. RACETRACK - STANDS - LATER

Ruben walks through empty stands. Stares out at the TRACK, empty except for a single HORSE and its TRAINER.

EXT. STABLES - SAME

AESOP CHURCH, 50s, sturdy, strolls past HORSES in their stalls. Whispers to his son FRANCIS, late 20s.

AESOP
When Viscomi goes out, shoot the Lasix or I'm'unna fuckin' smack ya. Hear me? I don't wanna have to tell you again.

FRANCIS
Awright, pop, Jesus.

They notice Ruben heading towards them.

AESOP
Here's the kid. What he got, you bring down to Geery before the ninth.

FRANCIS
I can't stand this fuckin' lowlife.

AESOP
Don't fuckin' curse so much. Learn some new words. Hiya, Ruben.

RUBEN
Hey, Mr. Church. Hey, Francis.

FRANCIS
It's Frank, okay? Please.

AESOP
Francis, go do that thing.

Francis snorts. Leaves.

AESOP
Whaddaya got for me, kid?

Ruben reaches into his jacket. Pulls out two COKE VIALS. Hands them over.

AESOP
That's the stuff. So where you at so far on Damascus?

RUBEN
Little over three.

AESOP
You get eight or nine together, I got some people maybe can talk to the owners. You're in the pink so far, though. No plans to race her yet.

RUBEN
(smiles; visibly pleased)
Thanks, Mr. Church.

AESOP
Keep at it. You'll have her, kid.

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Noel walks around, checking out the multitude of SEEDY PEOPLE. It seems the EYES OF A THOUSAND MONSTROUS CHARACTERS are on her.

EXT. DOWNTOWN TENEMENT - NIGHT

Ruben runs up the block, enters the tenement building.

INT. TENEMENT - SAME

Ruben comes up the stairs. Knocks on a door. No answer. Knocks again. Nothing.

RUBEN
Yo, Alamide.

He tries the doorknob. It turns.

INT. ALAMIDE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Ruben enters the small room. Looks around. All is quiet.

RUBEN
Anybody home?

Suddenly, DAPHNE runs out of the kitchen in a mad craze, brandishing a CARVING KNIFE. Goes after Ruben.

DAPHNE
BLACK HEART! BLACK HEART!

Daphne brings the knife down on him. He ducks and it sticks in the wall. She pulls it out and goes for him again.

DAPHNE
BLACK HEART!

RUBEN
What the fuck? Daphne, it's me, Ruben.

She stabs at him again. Misses. She RAISES THE KNIFE. Instinctively, he SWINGS AT HER -- WHAP!

SHE'S KNOCKED COLD. Sprawled on the wooden floor.

Alamide runs in. Sees her on the floor.

ALAMIDE
What the fuck you do, man?

RUBEN
Bitch came at me with a knife, man.

ALAMIDE
Don't be callin' my lady a bitch, man.

RUBEN
She could have killed me.

ALAMIDE
(sees his point)
Awright, awright, yeah. So how you doin', man?

EXT. STREETS - SAME

Noel continues on. Looks behind her. A SCARY GUY appears to follow her. She accelerates her pace.

She ROUNDS A CORNER, looks behind her -- he's still there. She runs.

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL - SAME

Noel sprints breathlessly up the block and into the hotel.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - LOBBY - SAME

Noel runs straight into Mr. Man, flanked by Abra, Ma Love and Christine.

She looks up into his eyes, terrified. He pulls her into his arms, holds her. Whispers gently into her ear as she cries... her Protector.

Ma Love shoots her the evil eye.

INT. ALAMIDE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Daphne lies unconscious on the floor, her Doberman DADDY curled up next to her.

Alamide sits on the couch applying CLEAR NAIL POLISH to his thumb while Ruben changes channels on the T.V.

ALAMIDE
I told her use the nipple. I ain't never shoot cocaine with no plunger. Too fast, man. Get air bubbles and shit. But she say she knows what she's doin'. Next thing I know, she ask me why I'm always talkin' 'bout 'Dog Shit'-this and 'Dog Shit'-that. I say, 'cause baby, your muh-fuckin' dog always smell like shit. When you gonna give the motherfucker a bath? That was it, man. She went crazy, talkin' 'bout, my heart smell like dog shit, that it's black like dog shit. Picks up a knife, screamin' Black Heart over and over so I run into the bedroom, lock the door, let that shit wear itself out. Then you come in and pull this Larry Holmes shit.

RUBEN
Sorry, man.

ALAMIDE
S'okay. Her heart still beatin'. She just sleep it off.
(re: his thumb)
Damn, my shit's all scratched up. Yo, turn that channel back, man.

Ruben turns the channel back. Music video for *White Lines*.

ALAMIDE
Grandmastah.

RUBEN
How's your mom, man?

ALAMIDE
My pops don't give her any damn money, that's how. Cheap motherfucker. I'm up there every other weekend, sneakin' in, puttin' some bread in her hand. It's fucked up.

RUBEN
So you gonna work the street anytime soon?

ALAMIDE
Why? You wanna run with me?

Alamide finishes the last coat of polish. Picks his KNIFE off the table. Uses his thumb to FLICK THE BLADE in and out several times until he's satisfied.

RUBEN
I could use the money, man. Long as we don't hurt nobody.

ALAMIDE
I ain't never hurt nobody. I'm like Robin Hood and shit, only 'the poor' is me.

RUBEN
We gotta go, we're gonna make the movie.

ALAMIDE
Hold up.

He exits the room, comes back in with a blanket and pillow. Gently PLACES THE PILLOW UNDER DAPHNE'S HEAD on the floor, then COVERS HER WITH A BLANKET. They leave.

EXT. CADDY - NIGHT

Mr. Man drives down the street with all four girls in the car. Ma Love glares at Noel. A look of jealous hatred.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

An enormous MARQUEE reads *THE WOODS ARE ALIVE.* Ruben and Alamide stand in a long line, waiting. The people are loud. The atmosphere, rowdy.

EXT. 11TH AVENUE & 38TH STREET - NIGHT

The Caddy pulls to the curb. Ma Love and Noel are the only girls left in the car. Ma Love gets out. Hesitates to close the door.

MA LOVE
Where you goin' with her?

Mr. Man shoots her a look that could freeze ice. She slams the car door. He pulls away.

NOEL
Where we goin'?

MR. MAN
I figured you been through some miserable shit these few weeks last, you might wanna go out dancin', get your freak on some. How that sound?

INT. DANCE CLUB - LATER

Noel and Mr. Man cut it up on the DANCE FLOOR. Noel seems freer than she's been. Dances with abandon.

INT. DANCE CLUB - BAR - SAME

Mr. Man and Noel head back to the crowded bar. He pushes to the front, pulling her behind him.

MR. MAN
Whatchoo want to drink, baby?

Suddenly, a GUY at the bar whirls around to Mr. Man, excited.

GUY
Mr. Man?!?

MR. MAN
So-lo-mon. Shit.

They embrace.

MR. MAN
Whatchoo doin' way up here, man?

SOLOMON
Ah, you know, you know.

MR. MAN
Yo, Solomon, this a good friend of mine, Noel. Noel, this here Solomon, my brutha from anotha mutha.

SOLOMON
Pleasure to meet you, Noel.

He kisses her hand. She giggles.

MR. MAN
Still too smooth, man. You in Chicago, still?

SOLOMON
Yeah, you know. I just come up here for a couple days, see some friends, but shit, I didn't know you was up here. We got us a table in the back. Why don't you and your beautiful young friend come sit with us? I'm'a just get us a bottle of the bubbly.

MR. MAN
(to Noel)
That alright with you?

NOEL
Yeah.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - CONCESSION STAND - SAME

Alamide and Ruben order from the GIRL.

GIRL
You want butter on that?

ALAMIDE
Yeah. Don't just put it on top, neither. Fill it up half, then put the butter in the middle, then fill it up the top, then put the butter on top. And a coke.
(to Ruben)
You want a coke?

RUBEN
Sprite, man. Coke keeps me up.

ALAMIDE
Awright, and a Sprite.

GIRL
Seven Up okay?

ALAMIDE
I guess. That's all you got.

INT. DANCE CLUB - BACK TABLE - SAME

A LONG TABLE far from the dance floor. Mr. Man holds court with a large group of MEN and WOMEN, charming them all with his silver tongue.

He glances down at Solomon and Noel, sitting across from each other at the end of the table. Solomon pours her another glass of champagne. Noel is tipsy.

NOEL
I never had champagne before.

SOLOMON
Beautiful thing like yourself? Shit, you oughta be bathin' in it. Girl like you deserves the best of everything.

NOEL
It's sweet. Like pot a little.

SOLOMON
I got some nice Thai stick, too, you wanna smoke it later.

NOEL
Sure. I like your necklace.

Solomon wears a GOLD CROSS around his neck.

SOLOMON
This? Tell you what...

He takes it off, goes around the back of Noel's chair and PUTS IT AROUND HER NECK. Mr. Man watches. Smiles.

INT. CLUB - DANCE FLOOR - LATER

Solomon and Noel dance with drunken abandon.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - SAME

Alamide and Ruben sit in the packed, dark AUDITORIUM watching the CHEESY HORROR MOVIE and sharing a joint. Two TEENS are ONSCREEN walking through a desolate CABIN.

MALE TEEN
I'm telling you, Holly, there's no one else in here but you and me.

AUDIENCE (O.C.)
Yeah man, bust that shit.

FEMALE TEEN
I don't know, Rod. Maybe we should go back to the lake with everyone else.

MALE TEEN
What's wrong, Holly?

AUDIENCE (O.C.)
You ugly, that's what's wrong.

FEMALE TEEN
Well, it is my first time.

Alamide and Ruben hoot and holler with the rest of the crowd.

EXT. CADDY - NIGHT

Mr. Man, Noel and Solomon cruise the streets. Everyone giddy, high, loving life.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - MR. MAN'S ROOM - LATER

Mr. Man, Solomon and Noel stumble into the room. Noel seems changed somehow. Not so lost. At ease.

MR. MAN
One last drink. C'mon, man.

SOLOMON
I should really be on my way. Got a train to catch in five hours. Up Boston.

NOEL
That place was so fun.

SOLOMON
Oh shit. I just realized, we never smoked that Thai stick I promised you. Far be it from me to break a promise.

MR. MAN
There you go.

Solomon plops down in a chair, pulls out the bag of WEED and some ROLLING PAPERS from inside his coat pocket.

Noel sits on the couch across from him. Mr. Man sits next to her, passes around some beers as Solomon ROLLS A JOINT. Mr. Man puts his arm around Noel, fingers the Gold Cross around her neck.

MR. MAN
That's nice.

NOEL
Thank you... again. I love it.

SOLOMON
Hey, best of everything, like I said.
(beat)
But I gotta say, though, Mr. Man, I been thinkin' something all night that I wasn't sure if I should say or not 'cause, you know, I didn't wanna offend you *or* this beautiful thing right here.

MR. MAN
Whatchoo talkin' 'bout, man?

SOLOMON
Nah, forget it.

MR. MAN
Damn, Solomon, you blushing, man.
(to Noel)
Ain't he blushing?

NOEL
(giggles)
He's turning all red.

MR. MAN
I ain't never known you turn all red. Now I gotta know. What's on your mind, man?

SOLOMON
Really?

MR. MAN
Yeah, nigga. We both open-minded people.
(to Noel)
Right? We open-minded.

NOEL
Yeah.

SOLOMON
Alright, well, I'll just --
(spits it out; to Noel)
I'll give you fifty dollars right now if I can just... see you... without your shirt on. Just look at you.

Mr. Man's face drops, as does Noel's.

MR. MAN
She's seventeen, man.

SOLOMON
Yeah, but she looks and acts like she's at least 23. I just wanna see if all of her is as beautiful and perfect as the rest.

Noel giggles.

MR. MAN
See? We both think you fulla shit, Solomon. Crazy motherfucker.

SOLOMON
A hundred. Hundred bucks. Just to look.

Mr. Man and Noel both crack up.

MR. MAN
You go on now, Solomon.

SOLOMON
Two hundred.

Mr. Man and Noel go suddenly still. Serious.

MR. MAN
I don't believe you. You believe him?

NOEL
No.

MR. MAN
Show me.

Solomon reaches into his jacket pocket. Pulls out ROLLS OF HUNDREDS. Peels off two, sets them on the table.

Noel and Mr. Man stare at the bills. Look at each other.

NOEL
I could just... take them?

MR. MAN
Got to do what the man asks first, but then... I don't know, yeah, I guess. Up to you, baby, shit...

She stares hard at the bills. Doesn't take long.

She REMOVES HER SHIRT. Solomon STARES AT HER NAKED BREASTS. She grabs up the bills.

SOLOMON
Goddamn, girl. I have never seen anything in all my years on earth as beautiful as you.

Noel blushes.

SOLOMON
Will you do me another favor? Hold out your hand.

Noel looks to Mr. Man, who simply shrugs. She holds out her hand.

Solomon plunks down one bill after another in her palm, until she's hold FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS. Her eyes are wide as saucers. Mr. Man grabs them out of her hand.

MR. MAN
Hold on now, hold on --

NOEL
Wait.
(beat)
What do I have to do?

INT. MOVIE THEATER - SAME

The two MOVIE TEENS have sex as Alamide and Ruben watch. ONSCREEN, the MASKED KILLER slinks up behind them with a knife.

AUDIENCE (O.C.)
Behind you, motherfucker...

The knife is poised over the teens.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

Solomon sits at the edge of the bed. Noel KNEELS IN FRONT OF HIM, nervously. Starts undoing his pants.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - SAME

ONSCREEN, the Female Teen looks up in mid-orgasm and sees the Masked Killer above her. She SCREAMS.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

Noel plunges her head down into the fray. Solomon groans. Louder, louder.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - SAME

ONSCREEN, the knife plunges into the Male Teen's back over and over. The Audience gasps and curses.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

Solomon lets out a final groan. The orgasm.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - SAME

The Audience whoops, hollers, applauds as the Masked Killer pulls out his knife.

Alamide is beside himself with glee. Ruben looks oddly horrified. As if sensing something... somewhere.

INT. MR. MAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

Noel pulls her head up, looks up at the satisfied Solomon.

INT. MR. MAN'S ROOM - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Mr. Man sits on the couch watching the bedroom door. Solomon comes out, crosses to him.

Mr. Man holds out the wad of hundreds. Solomon takes it back, crosses to the door. Exits.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

Noel SPITS UP INTO THE TOILET. Her face pale, sickly.

Mr. Man walks in. Stands in the DOORWAY. Noel stares up at him. His face is kind, comforting.

He pulls her up into a tight embrace. Holds her there. Safe.

FADE OUT.

Over Black Title Card: Spring

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

The frost has melted, replaced by a warm breeze. The trees are sprouting new leaves. A rebirth. People walk a little slower now, breathing in the new season.

RONALD REAGAN (V.O.)
As an older American, I remember a time when people of different race, creed or ethnic origin in our land found hatred and prejudice installed in social custom and yes, in law. There is no story more heartening in our history than the progress that we have made toward the "brotherhood of man". Let us resolve that we the people will build an American opportunity society in which all of us -- white and black, rich and poor, young and old -- will go forward together arm in arm.

EXT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Alamide and Ruben stand outside looking around. Ruben spots a BLUE-COLLAR GUY heading towards them.

RUBEN
Guy in the jean jacket.

ALAMIDE
Nah, man. That's a muh-fuckin' working man, I ever saw one. Probably got a wife and kids waiting for his ass at home.
(MORE)

ALAMIDE (cont'd)
Them working class niggas more likely to fight for their money, then what? I gotta hurt him? Nah.

Alamide nods at a GUY at the CHECKOUT STAND inside.

ALAMIDE
Check it out. This dude right here, man. Don't stare right at him. You see that?

RUBEN
No. What?

ALAMIDE
Cashin' a check.

INT. TENEMENT - DAY

The CHECKOUT STAND GUY opens the door to the mini-hallway that leads to the locked front door. Alamide and Ruben rush in behind him. Force him into a corner.

Alamide holds his knife to the terrified Guy's throat.

ALAMIDE
Don't say shit.

Ruben stares into the Guy's pleading eyes, resigned, but obviously affected by them.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Alamide and Ruben do their secret handshake.

ALAMIDE
See you tonight, man.

They part ways.

INT. RUBEN'S ROOM - LATER

Ruben pulls the CASHBOX from under the bed. Unlocks it. Pulls a small wad of bills from his pocket. Counts it.

He adds it to the money in the box, takes out a pad. Pencils in the amount -- *$ 4,172.27*

He pauses a moment, swallows hard. Stares at the money, wrestling with what he'd had to do to get it. There's remorse there, but what's done is done.

EXT. WALL STREET - GENTLEMAN'S CLUB - DAY

Milton Klein stands outside the red-carpeted ENTRANCE. Shakes hands with several well-dressed FRIENDS. Enters.

CUT TO:

MR. MAN

Watches from his Caddy ACROSS THE STREET.

INT. GENTLEMAN'S CLUB - SAME

A plush DEN with thick couches and chairs. HIGHBROWS lounge around smoking cigars and reading the Wall Street Journal.

Klein and FIVE CRONIES -- AL KALMENSON, RICHARD IVERS, NEIL WEINSTOCK, TOM KATZ, and WALTER HAVERSHAM -- all 50s, sit, laugh, joke and smoke cigars. A PAGE approaches Klein.

PAGE
Mr. Klein, there's a call for you in the foyer.

INT. CLUB - FOYER - SAME

Klein takes the phone from the DESK CLERK.

KLEIN
This is Klein...

EXT. PAYPHONE - SAME

Mr. Man whispers. INTERCUT.

MR. MAN
Had enough time to think about things, Mr. Klein?

Klein's face drops at the voice.

KLEIN
Yes.

MR. MAN
Good, 'cause we all set for Friday night. Barbizon, up on Lexington.

KLEIN
That's in three days. I haven't even touched on the subject yet. This isn't something I can just blurt out over cocktails. I need another week.

MR. MAN
And I need some stamps to mail me some muh-fuckin' pictures. Nah, Mr. Klein. I think I been generous with time. We ready now. You do what you gotta do, bring me some clients. See you Friday.

He hangs up. So does Klein, who's gone white as a ghost.

INT. FASCINATION ARCADE - DAY

A Video Arcade. Young RUNAWAYS & TRUANTS play *Pac-Man, Defender, Space Invaders, etc.*

Ruben holds Danny up to reach the controls as Danny attempts to play *Tempest.* The game ends. Ruben lets him down. Danny CHECKS HIS POCKETS. Empty.

RUBEN
Mommy only give you two dollars?

DANNY
Yeah.

Ruben pulls out two dollars, hands them to Danny whose eyes light up.

RUBEN
Let's go get some more quarters.

They head for the change machine. Ruben notices Noel playing a game.

RUBEN
Oh snap. Look who likes *Donkey Kong,* little man.

DANNY
(emulating Ruben)
Ohhhh, snap.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Ruben negotiates the crowded SIDEWALK, holding a delighted Danny on his shoulders. Noel walks beside him. She seems different, walks with more confidence.

RUBEN
I used to like *The Hulk* 'fore they took it off last year. Way he could just get mad and change. Do what had to be done, then change back, y'know?

NOEL
That was cool.

RUBEN
I don't know why they took it off. Now I don't really watch much.

NOEL
You know what I used to love when I was a kid? *The Bionic Woman.*

RUBEN
I was never really into that, but my mom watched it sometimes.

DANNY
SMURFS!

Ruben tickles him.

RUBEN
Yo, keep it down up there, little man.

NOEL
Where is your mom?

RUBEN
She died.

NOEL
Were you guys close?

RUBEN
I don't know, I guess.

NOEL
Shit. I'm sorry.

He shrugs it off.

RUBEN
Long time ago...
(changes subject)
Listen, I don't know what you're doin' later, but my boy Alamide's in a breakdance battle down at The World tonight. I was thinkin' maybe you might wanna come with me, check it out.

NOEL
I've never seen one of those.

RUBEN
It's pretty fresh, you know --

CUT TO:

BOO

Following Ruben and Noel from a safe distance. He FOCUSES ON DANNY as he FINGERS THE PISTOL BENEATH HIS JACKET.

He picks up his pace. Notices MR. MAN'S CADDY pull up to the curb beside Ruben and Noel. Curses under his breath.

Watches Ruben and Danny get into the Caddy. Noel leans in then walks off as the Caddy pulls away.

INT. CADDY - DAY

Mr. Man and Ruben drive. Danny fidgets in the back.

MR. MAN
You been sleepin'?

RUBEN
Yeah.

MR. MAN
I expect that shit from the bitches but not from you. You got these big bags under your eyes. Why you lyin'?

RUBEN
I don't want you to worry about me.

MR. MAN
Who else gonna worry? All fucked up on the dream scene again?

RUBEN
No. I just... got a lot on my mind.

MR. MAN
You wanna talk about it? I'd feel better we talked about it.

RUBEN
I'm okay.

Mr. Man stares at him for a while. Knows Ruben's lying.

MR. MAN
Wanna tell me what you all was talkin' 'bout back there, little man?

RUBEN
Nothing. I was just askin' her if she wanted to go to The World tonight. Alamide's doing a breakdance battle.

MR. MAN
Alamide. Tell you one time, I tell you two times, that nigga's gonna drag you down, you keep goin' street-side with his ass. Lesson of the day: A man is defined by the company he keeps, and that motherfuckin' junkie-ass bitch is bad company.

RUBEN
He's okay.

MR. MAN
Nigga's a track star is what he is, but fuck all that. Ruben, don't go tryin' to socialize with that bitch back there. Talkin' 'bout takin' her out and shit. She get all independent-minded, you gonna fuck up my plans. I went downtown this very day, talk to our friend Mr. Milton Klein. Finalize the new game shit.

RUBEN
Really?

MR. MAN
You do want that muh-fuckin' stallion, don't you?

RUBEN
Yeah, but I mean, I just thought --

MR. MAN
I ever talk down to you?

RUBEN
What do you mean?

MR. MAN
You see how I treat all these niggas out here day in day out, how I handle my stable. But you and me, we got a different dynamic. I ever talk to you like anything other than a man?

RUBEN
No.

MR. MAN
And I never would. See, I trust you with my game -- that's a big motherfuckin' thing -- and we 'bout ready to make a play, so where your loyalty at, little man? With the pussy or with the man gave you a place?

RUBEN
With you.

Mr. Man stares him down hard. Believes him, then:

MR. MAN
I always say, ain't nothin' real 'til you say that shit out loud. Just don't be plantin' ideas in that bitch's head 'less they revolve around green or dick, we straight?
(off his nod)
Say it with me one time... *Green Dick.*

RUBEN
Green Dick.

MR. MAN
That's my boy.

Danny chimes in from the back.

DANNY
GREEN DICK!

MR. MAN
(laughs)
See? He knows.

Ruben stares back at Danny with sad eyes. Somewhere deep inside, he burns. Torn.

EXT. THE BRONX - DAY

To establish. Various neighborhoods in perpetual decay.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - SAME

Alamide walks past the chain-links and gardens of the front entrance. Passes a group of GUYS hanging in front. Bumps fists with them, then walks on past to the FRONT ENTRANCE.

INT. PROJECT HALLWAY - SAME

Alamide walks past GRAFFITI-SPRAYED WALLS to a steel FRONT DOOR and knocks. A meek WOMAN'S VOICE from the other side:

WOMAN'S VOICE
Who is it? What do you want?

ALAMIDE
It's just me, Mama.

WOMAN'S VOICE
Alamide?

The door is unlocked and opened. MAYDA, 50s, worn beyond her years, delights at the sight of her son. Alamide seems to have regressed in seconds to a Mama's boy.

MAYDA
Baby...

ALAMIDE
Hey, Mama.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - SAME

Alamide sits at a small table. Dips bread into sunny-side up eggs. Eats voraciously. Mayda boils water for tea.

MAYDA
Slow down, baby. You liable to bust a gut shovelin' that food the way you doin'. That girlfriend of yours don't feed you?

ALAMIDE
Daphne? Nah, Mama, she takin' good care of me. I just came on up here between classes. See, I got this new job teachin' dance class at this school in the city. I'm sweatin' all day, so my shit gets depleted.

MAYDA
Watch that filthy tongue in my house, young man.

ALAMIDE
Sorry, Mama. S'just street talk, you know.

MAYDA
Well, you ain't on the street right now.

ALAMIDE
I know. Sorry, Mama.

MAYDA
You really got a job like that, baby?

ALAMIDE
Yeah, Mama. I told you I'd make you proud. Pretty soon I'm'a save me up enough, get my own school, buy you and pops a house up Westchester somewheres.

MAYDA
Oh, baby, I'm so glad you finally doin' some good honest work.
(MORE)

MAYDA (cont'd)
I don't need no house long's I know you on God's path. I wish you'd go on down the shop, tell your daddy 'bout this new job.

ALAMIDE
He wouldn't believe anything I say, anyways, you know. But it's alright long's I know you know I'm doin' right. And I'm'a buy you that house someday, Mama, I swear it.

MAYDA
(adoringly)
Oh, baby... you too good...

ALAMIDE
'Til then, I want you to put this away.

He gets up, pulls a FIFTY DOLLAR BILL from his pocket.

ALAMIDE
It ain't nothin' but a small piece of my paycheck, but it's clean money, Mama, and you don't even need to tell dad anything about it.

Mayda stares at the bill a long while, trying to decide, then finally takes it. She embraces Alamide.

MAYDA
Thank you, baby.

ALAMIDE
Love you, Mama.

EXT. AUTOMOTIVE REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Several MEN work on cars; BILL MOSELY, black, 50s, is one of them. He adjust an engine with a serious, stern face.

CLOSE on ALAMIDE

Watching him from ACROSS THE STREET with a troubled expression.

Bill looks up and spots Alamide, who turns quickly and heads around the corner. LEM, another mechanic, comes up behind him.

LEM
Who's that?

BILL
(gravely)
Nobody.

Bill turns, walks past the confused Lem back into the garage.

INT. THE WORLD CLUB - NIGHT

The NIGHT CLUB is jam-packed. A RAPPER rhymes on stage as a BREAKDANCE BATTLE rolls on.

A large CIRCLE OF PEOPLE stands around Alamide and another BREAKER. Both do ELABORATE MOVES as the CROWD, including Ruben, Noel and Daphne cheer them on.

The Breaker does a particularly complex move. Alamide enters the circle. Mimics it to perfection, adding a little extra something.

The Breaker comes in. Does another impressive combination incorporating WINDMILLS, WORMS, and POPPING. Finishes with his arms crosses, staring down Alamide -- A CHALLENGE --

Alamide gets right in his face. An anger. A ferocity he's never shown. Something to prove.

ALAMIDE
Think you bad, motherfucker?

He starts a combination. Gets more and more complex until the crowd can't tell where the air ends and he begins. He finishes, staring the Breaker down furiously.

The Breaker moves in. Tries to mimic him, but it's no use. It's ALAMIDE'S VICTORY.

Daphne rushes in, kisses him. Ruben bumps fists with him. Alamide breathes heavily, his heart and mind somewhere else.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - RUBEN'S ROOM - LATER

Ruben and Noel stumble in, singing, playful, joyous.

NOEL
We gonna rock down to electric avenue/ and then we'll take it highya...

Noel crashes on Ruben's bed. Ruben goes to his desk, checks a drawer, pulls out a cassette.

RUBEN
I got the whole Eddie Grant tape if you want it. I don't listen to it that much.

NOEL
I'm more into New Wave. I only like that stuff if I'm dancing.

RUBEN
New Wave? Like what?

NOEL
J. Geils Band, Adam Ant, stuff like that. Why? What do you like?

RUBEN
I don't know. Anything loud. Drowns out the noise.

She laughs. Doesn't realize how serious he is.

NOEL
Dag, your friend was so good. I wish I could do something like that.

RUBEN
Really?

NOEL
Yeah, just the way he was moving. It was, like, beautiful, y'know? I wish I could do something beautiful like that.

RUBEN
Well, why can't you?

NOEL
Everything I try to do, I usually end up looking stupid.

RUBEN
Well, that's probably not true. I dunno, I think you could probably do anything you wanted to. I mean, why not? You're smart.

NOEL
I am?

RUBEN
(embarrassed)
Well, yeah, I mean -- I don't think you should think there's anything you couldn't do.. if you... I don't know...

Noel stares at him, her eyes change. The awkwardness of teenage seduction.

NOEL
C'mere...

Ruben hesitantly approaches.

RUBEN
What?

NOEL
I know one thing I can do.

She starts unbuttoning his jeans. He stops her. Fast.

RUBEN
Wait, wait, no. I didn't mean it like that. Why's it always gotta be about that?

NOEL
I wanna show you what I can do. It's just a blowjob.

He pulls her up. Pulls her toward the door.

RUBEN
You gotta go. Now.

NOEL
Well, wait. Jesus, Ruben. You're not gonna say anything to Mr. Man...

RUBEN
I'm not gonna say anything, just, you gotta go. I'm sorry.

He opens the door, shoves her through. Closes it. Smacks himself.

RUBEN
... stupid...

INT. KLEIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Klein sits at his desk writing in a ledger. Suddenly and violently, he throws his pen down. Frustrated.

Stares at several FRAMED PHOTOS on his desk. His WIFE & KIDS. Suddenly, presses the INTERCOM --

KLEIN
Janine?

INTERCOM
Yes, Mr. Klein?

KLEIN
Set up a lunch at The Monk with Haversham and Weinstock, and tell them to bring the Captains. They'll know what it means.

Hangs up. Buries his face in his hands.

EXT. RESTAURANT - COURTYARD - DAY

Klein holds court with his friends -- Kalmenson, Ivers, Weinstock, Katz and Haversham -- all nursing afternoon cocktails.

HAVERSHAM
Okay, Uncle Miltie, you got our attention.

IVERS
I was supposed to meet Sandra for lunch. We're planning our ten-year.

All offer their CONGRATULATIONS except Klein.

WEINSTOCK
Well, the gang's all here, Milt. Where do the Captains want to sail?

KATZ
O Captain, my Captain! Our fearful trip is done/ The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won...

All groan.

IVERS
Quickly Milt, before Tom starts in on the Tennyson.

All laugh but Klein. He takes a deep breath, summoning the courage.

KLEIN
Where do I start?

KALMENSON
Just give us the broadstrokes.

KLEIN
We've all been generous with one another over the years with regard to the Captains, their wants and needs, right? Always been open and honest at this table.

KATZ
That's why we're here.

KLEIN
Good, good, okay, good. I'll start with a question. Tom, you've been married, what, fourteen years?

KATZ
In love, if love be love, if love be ours, Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers...

All groan. Katz laughs.

KATZ
Fourteen in August. Why?

KLEIN
That's wonderful... um...
(beat; thinks)
Does... does your wife... still go down on you?

They all stare at him, dumbstruck.

SMASH CUT:

INT. LARGE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A luxury apartment. Haversham attempts to leash an unruly YORKSHIRE TERRIER.

HAVERSHAM
C'mon, you little shit.

MRS. HAVERSHAM (O.C.)
You going to walk Baby?

HAVERSHAM
Yes, dear...

MRS. HAVERSHAM, late 40s, bored and overweight, walks in.

MRS. HAVERSHAM
Don't forget my tampons. And pick me up a Reader's Digest, okay?

He stares at her as she passes. Looks down at the obnoxious dog. The pooper scooper in his hand. This is home.

INT. TOWNHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A bored Ivers and MRS. IVERS sit at a table pouring over PRICEY MENUS.

MRS. IVERS
We still need to pick the tent place.

IVERS
For Chrissake Carolyn, a *tent*?

MRS. IVERS
You're just going to have to spend. Ten years doesn't come cheap.

And by the looks of Ivers, he knows it.

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - DEN - NIGHT

Katz and MRS. KATZ sit watching DALLAS on T.V.

KATZ
Can I change it?

MRS. KATZ
No.

Their daughter, AMY, 14, walks in with her friend LYNN.

AMY
We're going to study over at Sally's, okay?

Katz stares at Lynn's perfect young body, looks her up and down, longingly. No one notices.

MRS. KATZ
Be home by eleven.

They leave. Mrs. Katz pats Katz on the belly.

MRS. KATZ
That's it. We're *both* going on a diet.

This is his life.

INT. RECEPTION HALL - NIGHT

Packed with the cream of HIGH SOCIETY. ABSTRACT ART adorns the walls. Kalmenson and MRS. KALMENSON nibble appetizers and stare at a bizarre sculpture.

MRS. KALMENSON
Do not embarrass me again. If you can't appreciate it, at least --

KALMENSON
I appreciate what it's *worth*, I just don't understand why?

BARRY FRANKEL, 40s, dashing, and his devastatingly gorgeous girlfriend ERIN. 20s, approach them.

FRANKEL
Al...

KALMENSON
(less than enthusiastic)
Barry, hiya doin'? You know my wife, Meryl. Meryl, Barry Frankel and his friend, uh...

ERIN
Erin.

Greetings all around.

KALMENSON
So who dragged *you* here?

Mrs. Kalmenson scowls at him.

FRANKEL
Dragged? I begged to come. Erin's in town modeling for the Halston show, one of the other models is dating this Basquiat character, so here I am.

KALMENSON
The Halston show... sure.

Kalmenson looks from Erin to his wife. Wishing he were Frankel.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Dimly lit. Couples everywhere. WEINSTOCK walks up to the MAITRE'D.

MAITRE'D
Usual table, Mr. Weinstock?

WEINSTOCK
Yes, please.

He's led past all couples to a table for one. The WAITER comes swiftly.

MAITRE'D
Usual carafe, sir?

WEINSTOCK
Yes, please.

MAITRE'D
And as usual, Alex will be your waiter.

He walks off, leaving Weinstock to stew.

WEINSTOCK
As usual.

FADE TO:

INT. HOTEL SUITE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Man stares at himself in a mirror. Looks sharp in a DOUBLE-BREASTED SUIT as he skillfully knots his tie. Mutters under his breath.

MR. MAN
... my reality is the fruit of my imagination... my reality is the fruit of my imagination...

Checks his watch.

MR. MAN
They gonna show...

A knock at the door.

MR. MAN
Yeah?

Ma Love enters. Looks him over, impressed.

MA LOVE
Someone at the door.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

An opulent DUPLEX SUITE. Mr. Man steps out of the room. Admires his set-up.

Christine, Ma Love, Abra, and Noel lounge in various corners of the room. All dressed with seductive class.

Roland, looking uncomfortable in a rented TUX stands behind a MAKESHIFT BAR with countless LIQUOR BOTTLES.

ROLAND
Why I gotta be Isaac, your motherfuckin' bartender? Shit.

Ruben lines up VIALS OF COKE on the glass coffee table.

EVERYONE READY FOR A PARTY. Mr. Man checks his watch, heads for the front door.

MR. MAN
Here we go...

He takes a deep breath. Opens the door, revealing KLEIN alone in the doorway.

MR. MAN
Mr. Klein.

KLEIN
I brought some friends. May we come in?

MR. MAN
Please...

He steps aside. Klein walks in followed by Kalmenson, Ivers, Weinstock, Katz and Haversham. All are wary but a hint of anticipation pervades.

KLEIN
We all agreed names wouldn't be necessary.

MR. MAN
Absolutely right, Mr. Klein...

Mr. Man reaches out, shakes their hands one by one...

MR. MAN
Mr. Kalmenson, Mr. Ivers, Mr. Weinstock, Mr. Katz, Mr. Haversham. Welcome to the party, gentlemen.

They look at one another -- *how does he know our names?*

MR. MAN
We all in the information business. That's why I know this arrangement gonna work out beautiful. Don't be shy now. C'mon in...

He ushers them all into the room. They marvel at the girls.

MR. MAN
I don't know what Mr. Klein told y'all, but this is how it's gonna work...

Guides them toward the coffee table where Ruben has laid out LINES OF COKE next to ROLLED-UP DOLLAR BILLS. Points to Roland.

MR. MAN
My man Roland mix you up a Manhattan, Cosmo-politan, whatever ya'll gentlemen drink. My man Ruben lay you out a line...
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
and my girls... well, they do anything you want... any way you want it...

OFF THEIR SMILES, we --

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Kalmenson sits on the bed, visibly nervous. Abra kneels down in front of him.

ABRA
Relax, Mr. Kalmenson.

She UNZIPS HIS FLY. Puts her hand in his pants.

ABRA
Good gravy. I can barely get my hand around it. You know whose dick yours is bigger than?

KALMENSON
Whose?

ABRA
You know.

KALMENSON
Barry Frankel's?

ABRA
Bingo, baby. I musta fucked Barry Frankel every which way, but he never gave me nothin' like this.

KALMENSON
(gaining confidence)
'Course not. 'Cause Barry Frankel's half a fag.

INT. ANOTHER ROOM - SAME

Katz, slight and harmless-looking, approaches Noel awkwardly.

NOEL
What do you want me to do?

KATZ
I don't know.

NOEL
Yes you do.

KATZ
(beat)
I want you to... be scared of me.

NOEL
I am.

She COWERS IN A CORNER as he approaches her.

KATZ
Darkling I listen; and for many a time I have been half in love with easeful death, Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme, to take into the air my quiet breath...
(beat)
What would you do... if I... forced myself on you?

NOEL
(whimpers)
Please don't rape me.

KATZ
(snapping out of it)
I'm sorry -- I -- what am I --?

NOEL
There's nothing I could do to stop you. You're bigger than me, you're stronger... I'm only fifteen... you could do anything you want to me, and I'd be helpless...

KATZ
(back into it)
That's right, you would. You know why? Because I'm the king of all I survey. And you know what you are?

NOEL
I'm nothing.

KATZ
(smiles; empowered)
That's right. Now... try to escape.

INT. PREVIOUS ROOM - SAME

Kalmenson gives it to Abra doggy-style.

KALMENSON
Apologize for fucking Barry Frankel.

ABRA
I'm sorry. Barry Frankel is a bitch compared to you.

KALMENSON
I AM THE MASTER OF FUCKING EVERYTHING!

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL SUITE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

A DIFFERENT ATMOSPHERE. Music blares. An elated Weinstock and Ivers sit on the couch with Ma Love between them, taking turns doing lines.

Klein is led up the stairs by Christine while a drunk Haversham chats with Mr. Man by the bar.

HAVERSHAM
... here's the beauty of it. You can usually purchase options for pennies a share when their expiration date's near. Right situation, their value can go through the roof overnight.

MR. MAN
Wha'bout them niggas at the SEC? I read they been crackin' down on that insider shit.

HAVERSHAM
SEC's a joke. They're only interested in unusual cases, trades involving mergers. They don't bother with the average businessman like you and me, might get tips here and there on changes in profits and dividends.
(beat)
You're gonna make some nice change with this little set-up --

MR. MAN
Well, this just the prototype.

HAVERSHAM
Prototype, shit. Best goddamn party I've ever been to. Had my dick sucked twice.

MR. MAN
I know, I been keepin' track.

HAVERSHAM
Well, you ever think of investing in the market, you come talk to me. I'll set you right up.

MR. MAN
I may do that, Mr. Haversham. I just may.

Mr. Man notices Noel coming down the stairs followed by Katz. Ruben heads over to them with a couple of MIXED DRINKS. Hands one to each of them.

Mr. Man's eyes harden as he watches Ruben exchange words with Noel. Doesn't like the interaction between them.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL SUITE - BEDROOM - LATER

Mr. Man sits on the bed -- ADDS UP THE CHECKS AND CASH IN A LEDGER --

INT. SUITE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

All the Businessmen are gone. Roland laughs it up with the girls. All except Noel, who is noticeably quiet, sits by herself, Ruben watching her.

Mr. Man walks in. All eyes go to him.

MA LOVE
Well? How we do, baby?

MR. MAN
We keep on like this... pretty soon y'all gon' have some motherfuckin' pension plans...

OFF THEIR LAUGHTER --

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

ANOTHER PARTY -- MORE CROWDED THAN THE LAST -- an UPSCALE CROWD -- DRINKING, SNORTING, FEELING UP THE GIRLS.

Mr. Man and Ruben work the room. Ruben keeps a watchful eye on Noel who's flanked by overeager BUSINESSMEN. She plays shy and guarded --

CUT TO:

HAVERSHAM & MR. MAN

Sitting in a corner of the crowded room, pouring over the COMMODITIES SECTION OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Haversham circles items while giving the compliant Mr. Man an earful.

HOTEL SUITE - VARIOUS BEDROOMS

SHORT FLASHES of Ma Love, Abra, Christine and Noel in different POSITIONS, COSTUMES, & ODD SCENARIOS with countless BUSINESSMEN...

INT. LINCOLN SAVINGS BANK - DAY

Mr. Man sits in the WAITING AREA getting suspicious looks from the SECURITY GUARD. An ACCOUNT MANAGER approaches him.

ACCOUNT MANAGER
Can I help you, sir?

INT. BANK - ACCOUNT MANAGER'S DESK - LATER

The Account Manager hands a BANK BOOK across the table to a satisfied Mr. Man.

ACCOUNT MANAGER
... should get your checks in the mail within a couple weeks...

INT. MR. MAN'S ROOM - DAY

Mr. Man doles out small amounts of CASH to the less-than-satisfied Ma Love, Abra, and Christine. He USHERS THEM OUT -- KEEPS NOEL BEHIND --

CARESSES HER FACE. She closes her eyes, enjoying the attention. He leads her into his bedroom.

INT. RUBEN'S ROOM - DAY

Various FLASHES of RUBEN ADDING CASH TO HIS LOCKBOX. He PENCILS IN THE AMOUNT, which continues to increase as he adds more -- *$ 4,782.44* -- *$ 5,231.08* -- *$ 5,976.86* --

EXT. TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK - DAY

Alamide confers furtively with three TOUGHS -- ADEO, STROM and MALIK. Adeo pulls out a LARGE BAG OF POT, hands it to Alamide.

ALAMIDE
Yeah, man, I can sell it.

EXT. RACETRACK - FIELD - DAY

Ruben stands out in the field with DAMASCUS and her TRAINER. Aesop and Francis HOLD THE REIGNS as Ruben pats her nose.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

ANOTHER PARTY. Large Crowd. Decadent behavior. Noel seems MORE AT EASE with the attention. Looser.

Ruben watches her from across the room with remorse.

INT. BLOOMINGDALES - DAY

Ma Love and Christine pass the PERFUME COUNTER. Strange looks follow them.

A FEMALE CLERK sprays Ma Love with a SAMPLER. Ma Love smacks her. EMPLOYEES jump in to break up the catfight.

INT. BLOOMINGDALES - TOY DEPARTMENT - SAME

Abra and a BUSINESSMAN struggle over the last CABBAGE PATCH DOLL. The Businessman yanks it from her, walks off. Danny screams and cries hysterically --

CUT TO:

ELEVATOR BANK

Abra tries to comfort the distraught Danny as she explains to Mr. Man --

SMASH CUT:

Mr. Man BEATS THE BUSINESSMAN SENSELESS in an EMPTY STAIRWELL. Snatches up the doll.

BACK TO:

Mr. Man hands the doll to Danny, wipes away his tear.

INT. RUBEN'S ROOM - DAY

The dollar amount in the Lockbox increases, culminating in $ 7,600. He takes out the COLLAGE, focuses on the Woman.

INT. EMPTY STORE - DAY

Alamide, Ruben and Daphne walk through the large EMPTY SPACE with the LANDLORD. The grand tour. Alamide's eyes are wide.

LANDLORD
Still available... for now...

INT. CADDY - DAY

Mr. Man sits, CIRCLES STOCKS IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. CLOSEUP of the PAPER reveals the stocks have risen. Smiles.

INT. BANK - TELLER'S WINDOW - DAY

Mr. Man passes the Bank Book to the TELLER along with an eye-popping STACK OF CASH & CHECKS.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

ANOTHER PARTY. Business as usual now. Mr. Man observes his handiwork, pleased. Looks and feels prosperous. Powerful.

FADE OUT.

Over Black Title Card: Summer

EXT. CONEY ISLAND - 4TH OF JULY - NIGHT

The lights of the OLDEST AMERICAN AMUSEMENT PARK sparkle. And it's packed. MEN and WOMEN swelter in the evening heat.

RONALD REAGAN (V.O.)
While we must be cautious about forcing the pace of change, we must not hesitate to declare our ultimate objectives and to take concrete actions to move toward them...

EXT. CONEY ISLAND BOARDWALK - SAME

SPARKLERS EVERYWHERE. Ruben and Noel watch the FIREWORKS DISPLAY. She seems at ease. He has to work harder at it.

NOEL
You're really fucking strange, you know that, Ruben?

RUBEN
What? Why?

NOEL
I don't know, you just are. You're one way one minute then quiet the next. You can be strange.

RUBEN
Fine, so I'm strange.
(points)
That's where they used to have the diving horses. Back in, like, the old days. The old days were fucked up.

NOEL
Yeah. Fuck the old days. So why do you like horses so much?

RUBEN
My dad used to train 'em.

NOEL
Was he cool?

RUBEN
Yeah, he was cool.

NOEL
What about your mom?

RUBEN
She fucked around on him a lot 'til he wasn't... so cool anymore.

NOEL
Is that why you hate girls?

RUBEN
Just 'cause I don't wanna fuck you doesn't mean I hate girls. What's with all the questions? Jesus.

NOEL
Take it easy, man. I just don't want you to be so strange with me. I mean... why do you talk to me all the time then? Why'd you take me out here?

RUBEN
I don't know. I just like to... see how you are. It's too fuckin' hot out here.

An uncomfortable silence between them.

RUBEN
You should go back. I shouldn't've even brought you out.

He starts walking away.

NOEL
What do you mean I should go back? You're just gonna leave me here?
(he keeps walking)
Jesus, Ruben. You're an asshole, man. There's something seriously wrong with you.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

It's late. Not many people in here. One PIMP and his GIRL. A couple others. Ruben walks in, sits down. A tired WAITRESS walks up.

WAITRESS
What can I getcha?

RUBEN
What kinda soup you got?

WAITRESS
You want soup? In this heat? You're gonna melt, kiddo.

Suddenly, ANOTHER PIMP walks in, storms up to the other Pimp's table.

PIMP #1
Whatchoo doin' with my bitch, man?

PIMP #2
She a free agent now, nigga.

They argue. Ruben stares hard at them. Creases his eyes.

WAITRESS
Don't get involved.

RUBEN
What?

WAITRESS
Don't get involved.
(calls off)
Jimmy, get out here... we got a problem...

RUBEN
(under his breath)
... I am involved...

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - HALLWAY - LATER

Ruben knocks on ROLAND'S DOOR.

ROLAND (O.C.)
Who?

RUBEN
Ruben.

Roland answers. Looks tired, strung out.

ROLAND
What the fuck time is it?

RUBEN
2:30. He asleep?

ROLAND
Yeah, man. Since ten, like you said.

CUT TO:

A SHADY GUY watches Ruben from the other side of the hall.

INT. ELEVATOR - SAME

Ruben carries a sleeping Danny in his arms. The doors open and he steps into --

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

-- where people stand in their doorways, peering down the hall to where Ma Love SCREAMS & BANGS ON MR. MAN'S DOOR --

MA LOVE
LYIN' MOTHERFUCKER. I'M'A KILL YOU *AND* THAT WHITE BITCH... OPEN UP THIS MOTHERFUCKER NOW!!!

Ruben stares dumbfounded as Danny starts to wake. He goes to Abra's door, unlocks it, heads inside.

INT. ABRA'S ROOM - SAME

Ruben walks briskly through the dark room to the bed. Lays Danny down.

DANNY
(yawning)
Who's yelling?

RUBEN
Nobody. You just go on back to sleep, little man, okay?

DANNY
Where's E.T?

RUBEN
I don't know. I'm gonna be right back. You just close your eyes.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Ruben runs into the hall where Ma Love continues banging on the door, cursing at the top of her lungs. Runs to her.

MA LOVE
I'M'A CUT YOU AND THAT WHITE BITCH UP...

RUBEN
What's going on?

Suddenly, the DOOR FLIES OPEN. Mr. Man, dressed only in boxers, storms out.

MR. MAN
Bitch, get on upstairs 'fore I get stupid on your ass.

Mr. Man turns to head back inside. Ma Love tries to storm past him into the room.

MA LOVE
I'm'a kill that white bitch...

Mr. Man grabs her by the hair, turns her around, throws her against the wall.

MR. MAN
Goddamit girl, this is business. That's all it is, you understand me? Why you messin' with my shit?

MA LOVE
(crying)
'Cause I love you, stupid motherfucker.

MR. MAN
I love you, too, stupid bitch. Now say it with me one time. This a business thang.

MA LOVE
This a business thang.

MR. MAN
That's right. Now go the fuck on upstairs. Now.

Ruben ducks past him through the OPEN DOOR --

INT. MR. MAN'S ROOM - SAME

Ruben heads into the darkened room. Finds Noel CURLED UP IN BED, under the covers. She shoots him a deadly look. Suddenly, Mr. Man comes up behind him.

MR. MAN
Fuck outta here, little man.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Ruben is tossed out, door slammed behind him. He stands there, stares at the door with regret. Ma Love stands a few feet away, cursing under her breath.

Amazed and disgusted, Ruben heads down the hall.

INT. ABRA'S ROOM - SAME

Ruben enters, heads over to the bed. Danny lies fast asleep. Ruben STROKES HIS HEAD. Notices something across the room.

Heads over, GRABS AN E.T DOLL from the dresser. Brings it back to the bed and places it next to Danny. Sits in a chair next to the bed, and watches Danny sleep.

EXT. STREET - DAY

BOO stands on one side of the street, under the awning of a BODEGA. Watches Abra walking along on the other side.

Turns his head and sees MR. MAN at the other end ARGUING WITH MA LOVE. Mr. Man slaps her.

Satisfied, Boo ROUNDS THE CORNER.

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL - SAME

A number of people loiter outside the entrance. A BEAT-UP BLUE DATSUN pulls up in front.

INT. DATSUN - SAME

GARY, the greasy guy at the wheel, kills the engine. Waits.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - ROLAND'S ROOM - SAME

Roland and his buddy FRANK sit on the couch, smoke dope and watch T.V. Danny crawls around on the carpet with his Transformer toy.

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. Roland gets up, walks over to it.

ROLAND

Who?

VOICE (O.C.)
Ruben.

Roland cracks the door, and --

WHAP! The flying door slams Roland back. DARRYL, the Shady Guy from the night before, forces his way in.

ROLAND
What the fu --?!?

CRACK!!

Darryl BREAKS ROLAND'S NOSE with the butt of a gun. Roland falls to his knees clutching his face. Frank watches from the couch, in a drug-induced daze, as Darryl levels the gun at him.

DARRYL
Just sit there. Don't even move.

FRANK
Wasn't goin' to...

Darryl snatches Danny up and runs out of the room.

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL - SAME

Darryl runs out holding the crying Danny. Runs up to the passenger side door of the Datsun. Boo steps out.

BOO
Gimme him.

Darryl hands him over. They all get in the car. Drive off.

EXT. STREET - SAME

Streets are GRIDLOCKED with car traffic. Ruben walks up the block carrying a paper bag. He stops at a corner, waits for the light to change.

Suddenly notices the Blue Datsun coming up the street. Sees Boo in the front seat with a hysterical Danny.

He drops the bag, starts chasing the car up the street.

RUBEN
(yelling)
STOP! STOP!

He loses it as it turns a corner. Curses, then continues running furiously down the street.

INT. DATSUN - SAME

Danny cries hysterically on Boo's lap.

DARRYL
Can't you make him shut the fuck up?

BOO
He's a kid, fer Chrissake. What're you gonna take the tunnel? It'll take a fuckin' hour to get through.

GARY
This traffic? GW'll be just as bad if not worse. Tunnel's at least closer.

BOO
(to Danny)
Hey, don't cry little guy. You think I'm a strange stranger? I'm your daddy. Your daddy-doody, cutie. Beep-beep. Beep-beep. The cars go beep-beep.

Danny cries harder.

BOO
You know the alphabet? Sing the alphy-betty, buddy. Sing it with me. A, Bitty-bitty, C, Ditty-ditty... c'mon, you know it, you got it...

DARRYL
Nutcase.

EXT. 11TH AVENUE - SAME

Ruben runs up to Ma Love standing on a corner.

RUBEN
Where's Mr. Man?

MA LOVE
I'm tired of his bullshit --

RUBEN
WHERE IS HE?

MA LOVE
'Cross the street, at the bodega.

EXT. BODEGA - SAME

Mr. Man walks out, sees Ruben running towards him from across the street, weaving through traffic.

MR. MAN
What's really goin' on, little man?

RUBEN
I just saw Danny in a car with Boo and two other guys.

MR. MAN
What? Roland s'posed to be watchin' him. I'm'unna kill the nigga. Come on.

Mr. Man and Ruben jump into the Caddy at the curb.

MR. MAN
Which way they goin'?

RUBEN
Down ninth.

MR. MAN
Goddamit. Motherfucker's headin' for the tunnel.

The car screeches out.

EXT. 11TH AVENUE - SAME

The Caddy turns left towards the ENTRANCE TO THE LINCOLN TUNNEL. Ruben points to the ramp heading down into the tunnel. Sees the Blue Datsun stuck in traffic.

RUBEN
That's them. The blue one.

Mr. Man pulls over to the curb.

INT. CADDY - SAME

Mr. Man reaches into his glove compartment. Pulls out a small pistol.

Reaches into the back seat, grabs a black ski mask.

MR. MAN
Keep it running.

Mr. Man jumps out. Heads purposefully toward the Blue Datsun -- PULLS ON HIS MASK --

INT. DATSUN - SAME

Darryl's nerves seem frayed by Danny's incessant crying.

DARRYL
I swear to fuckin' Christ, between the kid's screaming and this traffic, I SWEAR I'M GONNA FUCKIN' KILL SOMEBODY --

-- BOOM!

Darryl's HEAD EXPLODES in a hail of BULLETS AND FLYING GLASS.

Gary and Boo turn, frazzled, to see the masked Mr. Man heading for them, gun pointed.

GARY
Oh fuc --

-- BOOM!

Gary's brains explode onto Boo and Danny.

Instinctively, Boo pushes the PASSENGER DOOR OPEN -- crawls out, and --

-- DROPS DANNY, whose head hits the pavement with a crack --

Boo doesn't even look back. He WEAVES THROUGH BUMPER TO BUMPER CARS, unsure where to go. A rat in a maze.

Mr. Man spots him a couple rows down. Hops on the HOOD OF A CAR, jumps a few hoods until he is right above Boo.

THREE SHOTS POINT BLANK -- BAM! BAM! BAM!

He hops off the hood, heads back to Danny.

Finds him CRUMPLED ON THE PAVEMENT, blood pouring from his head wound. Frightened motorists stare from their cars.

Amid their panic, Mr. Man LIFTS HIM, runs off with Danny under his arm.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. CADDY - SAME

Ruben frantically checks Danny in the back seat. Mr. Man pulls off the mask as he drives.

RUBEN
What the fuck happened back there?

MR. MAN
Motherfucker dropped him.

RUBEN
We gotta get him to a hospital.

MR. MAN
You crazy?

RUBEN
There's a lotta blood back here.
He's gonna die.

MR. MAN
He already gone, little man.

RUBEN
No, no. Oh fuck. Oh no.

Ruben starts to cry. Tries to lift Danny into the front.

MR. MAN
Leave him in the back. Leave him.

Ruben does as he's told. Continues to whimper.

MR. MAN
Need to find us a phone.

Mr. Man turns away from him as he drives, his eyes hard except for a glint of moisture in the corners.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The Caddy is parked at the curb. Ruben sits in fronts as Mr. Man hangs up a PAYPHONE, heads back to the car. Gets in.

RUBEN
Where we going?

Mr. Man exhales. Pulls out.

EXT. HARLEM - DAY

The Caddy turns a corner and into an --

EXT. ALLEYWAY - SAME

The Caddy pulls up to the BACK ENTRANCE OF A TENEMENT and stops. Mr. Man gets out, pulls Danny from the back seat.

RUBEN
What are we doing up here? We gotta get him to a hospital.

MR. MAN
Stay here, little man.

Mr. Man carries Danny's lifeless body through the back door.

Ruben gets out of the car, paces.

A few seconds later, Mr. Man walks out with an OLDER MAN. They chat a few seconds, then Mr. Man pulls out a WAD OF CASH -- PEELS OFF SOME BILLS. Hands them over They shake hands and the Old Guy goes back in.

Curious and determined, Ruben heads for the doorway as Mr. Man heads for the car.

RUBEN
Who's that guy? Where's Danny?

MR. MAN
I told you stay in the car.

Mr. Man grabs him as Ruben tries to pass him.

MR. MAN
He gon' take care of shorty. Let's go now. Don't gimme no shit.

RUBEN
What do you mean take care of him? We gotta take him to Abra.

MR. MAN
You want her to see him like that?

RUBEN
So what're they gonna clean him up? What is this place?

MR. MAN
I'll take care of Abra. Now don't make me tell you again, get in the motherfuckin' car.

Ruben thinks. I's not good enough.

RUBEN
I'm going in.

Ruben defiantly tries to pass. Mr. Man grabs him.

RUBEN
Get off me.

Ruben pushes Mr. Man off, heads for the door.

Mr. Man comes up behind him -- PUNCHES RUBEN HARD IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD. He goes down. Mr. Man stands over him, furious.

MR. MAN
You gonna defy *me*? Who the fuck you think you is, little man? You don't defy me. You don't raise your hands at me, motherfucker. Far as you concerned, I'm your goddamn daddy, nigga. You don't never raise your hands at me.

RUBEN
(defiant)
What is this place?

MR. MAN
It's a motherfuckin' Crematorium my man Darius own, okay? You satisfied, nigga? They gonna burn shorty's little ass up, 'til they ain't nothin' but ash, and *then* Abra can see the motherfucker.
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
Smoke him. Do whatever the fuck she want with him.

RUBEN
This is not right --!

MR. MAN
Right? You one over-emotional nigga, you know that? Too soft for this shit. Lettin' your emotions get in the way your brain. You ever heard 'a rigor mortis, little man? I bring his little ass back to Abra, he stink up the motherfuckin' block, whose ass you think is on the line? You think I didn't love shorty, too? Why you think I did what I did out there in plain sight? I'd kill those niggas again two times quick if I could. But you best get wise, little man, 'cause we too close to the golden egg to let the goose get loose, dig? Now get up and get in the motherfuckin' car. We run by the A&P, get some ice for your shit.
(beat; exhales)
You disappoint me, little man.

EXT. STREET - LINCOLN TUNNEL ENTRANCE - LATER

POLICEMEN and PARAMEDICS are now part of the gridlock. Two PARAMEDICS load the covered dead Men into ambulances. Two DETECTIVES question a WITNESS.

WITNESS
I saw his hands, though. He was definitely black.

DETECTIVE #1
And that's all you can remember.

WITNESS
He had a mask on, so...

DETECTIVE #1
Okay, that's all we need. Thank you Mr. Salinas.

The Detectives walk off.

DETECTIVE #2
Tall black guy with a Saturday Night Special kills an ex-Pimp and two low rent block hustlers. That narrows it down.

DETECTIVE #1
Whaddaya think?

DETECTIVE #2
I think this whole fuckin' thing doesn't make a shit of difference. You wanna waste time on this? What do I care they kill each other off?

DETECTIVE #1
Whole thing's public though. A civilian could've gotten hurt. Papers are gonna want a statement.

DETECTIVE #2
Times won't touch this with a ten foot pole. We leak some bunco to the Post about 'Pimp Wars', give 'em a headline, we'll be home in time to tuck in our kids.

Detective #1 just laughs. All neatly wrapped up.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - ABRA'S ROOM - DAY

Abra, in hysterics, throws anything she can at Mr. Man, who's trying to calm her down.

Ruben stands in one corner of the room, trying to contain his tears, as does Noel. Christine and Ma Love stand mutely by.

ABRA
(screaming)
You were supposed to be watching him. You sonofobitch...

MR. MAN
Roland *was* watching him, baby. Swear to Almighty God. He got his nose broke trying to protect shorty.

ABRA
You said we'd be safe...

Mr. Man catches her as she collapses into his arms.

ABRA
My baby... my baby...

MR. MAN
I killed them niggas done this to Danny, baby. They dead and gone for what they did.

Abra can't move, she's paralyzed and exhausted with grief.

MR. MAN
I know, baby, let it out. I'm'a see you through this. We all will. We ain't never leave you alone through this...

ABRA
I don't wanna live anymore... my... baby... I don't wanna live...

Christine, Ma Love and Noel fight back tears. Ruben and Mr. Man lock eyes. Ruben stares at him as if seeing him for the first time, and with a look of PURE HATE. He storms out.

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL - SAME

Ruben bolts out, starts down the street in a hurry. Noel comes out after him, tries to catch up.

NOEL
Ruben... wait --

He whirls on her in a burst of tears and fury.

RUBEN
See, you don't know yet 'cause it's just starting to happen to you. I *know.* This place... this fucking place... kills everything good. You don't know it's happening 'cause the minute you step off the bus it starts, even though you can't feel it. Then one day you wake up and you realize some -- some little piece of you is missing, and even though you know it's gone, you can't remember exactly what it was or why you needed it...

Noel looks perplexed, unsure of what to make of him.

NOEL
Ruben, I... it's fucked up what happened to Danny --

Ruben grabs her by the shoulders. Startles her.

RUBEN
DON'T TELL ME IT'S FUCKED UP! I PLAYED WITH HIM, PUT HIM TO BED. I SPENT AS MUCH TIME WITH HIM AS HIS OWN MOTHER, OKAY? MY HEART... I CAN'T...
(whimpers)
But if he lived another couple years, he would've started changing too, and that would've been even sadder...
(beat; cries)
... and I hate myself for thinking that.

Ruben collapses into her arms, a wreck. She holds him.

NOEL
... it's okay...

RUBEN
I can help you before it happens. Please let me help you. This place... kills everything good...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HUDSON RIVER PARKWAY - DUSK

Ruben and Noel walk along the river.

RUBEN
Can I ask you something?

NOEL
Yeah.

RUBEN
What if you had, like, six thousand dollars right now? Like if you had it right now in your hand. What would you do?

NOEL
But I don't, so what difference does it make?

RUBEN
Would you leave?

NOEL
And do what?

RUBEN
I don't know, maybe go up to somewhere upstate or in New England. Rent a place. Get a normal job... like in a bakery or someplace. Y'know, like a person.

NOEL
It doesn't make sense to think about it 'cause I don't have that kind of money. Everything I make --

RUBEN
Well, but what if I *gave* you six thousand dollars to do that? To get on a bus, get outta here, work at someplace in Connecticut or something. Would you go?

NOEL
Ruben, why --? You don't have six thousand dollars, so --

Ruben stops and stares at her intensely.

RUBEN
But if I did. Would you go?

Noel sees the sincerity in his eyes. It's affecting, but --

NOEL
No.

RUBEN
(pained)
Why?

NOEL
I like it... when he fucks me.

The look on Ruben's face says it all. He's crushed.

NOEL
He fucks me like he loves me.

RUBEN
He doesn't.

NOEL
He makes me feel like he does. He makes me feel safe. Otto couldn't do that. My stepfather... he fucked me like he hated me. He wanted me to leave. So okay. Now I'm here, and Mr. Man wants me to stay, and he makes me feel good that I do. You see?

RUBEN
Yeah. I see you're already dead.

Ruben coldly walks off. Noel's offended.

NOEL
Fuck you, Ruben.

RUBEN
And you've already got a mouth like a whore.

This infuriates her. She runs up behind him, pushes him hard. He spins around.

NOEL
Why am I so important to you anyway, huh? What gives you the right to talk so mean to me? Tell me this place kills everything good, like I've never been anywhere. This place didn't kill Danny. His own father did. I've been in a place that kills everything good and lemme tell you, here makes more sense.

RUBEN
You're all mixed up and confused. If you could just see yourself --

NOEL
And you're not? You been here a lot longer than me.

RUBEN
I'm trying to give you a way out, and you're too fucking damaged already to take it.

NOEL
Are you in, like, love with me? Is that why you never touch me?
(MORE)

NOEL (cont'd)
Am I just too precious to you? Is that why you wanna whisk me off to play house in Connecticut?

RUBEN
I can't go. I just want *you* to go.

NOEL
Or maybe you do just wanna fuck me, and you think I'll be impressed that you care? 'Cause if you just wanna fuck me, Ruben, just say so.

RUBEN
I don't wanna fuck you. Why's it always have to be about that?

NOEL
Why not Christine or Ma Love? WHY DO YOU GIVE SUCH A FUCK ABOUT ME?

RUBEN
'Cause *I* found you. *I* saved you from dying on the street with Otto. And you would have, believe me. But so what if you had? You're no better off now. The only difference is I feel responsible, okay? I don't love you, I don't wanna fuck you, I don't wanna know anything about you, okay? But I can still save you.

NOEL
And what if I don't wanna be saved?

Ruben stares blankly at her. Has no response to this.

NOEL
I mean, that was really fucking persuasive, asshole. Thanks for caring. This is about you. From now on... stay far the fuck away...

Noel turns, walks off. Ruben watches her go. Helpless.

INT. ABRA'S ROOM - DAY

Abra stands over a pile of Danny's stuff, her face blank.

INT. ABRA'S ROOM - LATER

Abra stands by the sink. HOLDS A RAZOR OVER HER WRIST. Her hands shake. She breaks down. Can't do it.

INT. MR. MAN'S ROOM - SAME

Mr. Man sits at his desk -- MONEY MAGS, WALL STREET JOURNAL, LEDGERS, and other BUSINESS PARAPHERNALIA. Does paper work.

Ma Love pops up from under the desk. He pushes her back down. Continues working.

INT. CHRISTINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Christine snorts THC off her wrist, watches the T.V Movie *THE DAY AFTER.* On T.V, NUKES DROP -- PEOPLE BECOME SKELETONS --

She watches, terrified.

INT. RUBEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ruben tries to sleep. Tosses and turns in bed.

FLASHES of the RECURRING NIGHTMARE -- THE MAN PUTTING THE GUN IN HIS MOUTH -- GUNSHOTS -- SCREAMS OF PAIN --

Ruben pops up, sweating.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

Ruben walks toward the exit. Noel walks in. They pass by one another. Neither gives so much as a glance, as Ruben heads into the --

EXT. STREET - SAME

Ruben jumps down the steps, heads off.

MR. MAN watches him from across the street. Stares hard.

CLOSER ON HIS EYES

Watches Ruben with a hint of sadness. And remembers...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MOTEL STAIRWELL - 1980 - NIGHT

Seedy place you rent by the hour. Mr. Man and SOLLY, the proprietor, head up the stairs. Mr. Man hands him a couple bills. Solly counts.

SOLLY
That's fine, but Ro don't clean the cum off the sheets again, we got a problem.

MR. MAN
Ain't no problem can't be solved. I'll talk to her.

They head towards the landing where a COMMOTION CAN BE HEARD.

SOLLY
Fuck's goin' on... ?

They reach the landing. Down the HALLWAY, a half-naked BIG BEAR of a guy has cornered a younger RUBEN, who holds a pair of pants. Ruben looks for an escape, but there's no way around him.

SOLLY
Fuck's goin' on down there?

BIG BEAR
Little cocksucker won't lemme fuck 'im, then he steals my pants, my fuckin' money in 'em...

SOLLY
Give 'im back his pants, kid.

RUBEN
No.

Mr. Man and Solly laugh. Can't believe the kid.

SOLLY
You believe this? Balls on this kid.

MR. MAN
Nigga gotta be twice his size, man.

Big Bear's got murder in his eyes. He lunges at the scared and cornered Ruben. An all out BRAWL, but Ruben's quick and dodges most of the blows, all while HOLDING ON TO THE PANTS FOR DEAR LIFE.

SOLLY
I can't have this shit in here.

MR. MAN
Hold up, Solly, I wanna see this.

He placates Solly with another bill as the fight continues. Ruben LANDS A PUNCH, manages to disorient Big Bear long enough to squeeze out of his corner.

People come out of their rooms to watch the fracas.

Big Bear whirls around -- TACKLES RUBEN, who struggles --

BIG BEAR
I'm'unna fuckin' kill you...

Life or death. Ruben notices KEYS attached to a beltloop on the pants. Grabs for them. Turns over, Big Bear on top of him, and --

SHOVES A KEY INTO BIG BEAR'S UNPROTECTED LEG

Big Bear falls off screaming, whimpering. An elephant with a thorn in its toe. Ruben stands, pulls on the pants and yanks the key out --

MR. MAN
(awed)
... damn...

SOLLY
I can't have this in here.

Solly starts heading down the hall.

Ruben looks down at Big Bear, feigns like he's going to stab him again --

BIG BEAR
... don't... please...

Ruben turns and runs as Solly approaches him fast.

Ruben swings the pants at him, hitting him with keys. Makes it past him, heading toward Mr. Man.

He swings the pants at Mr. Man, who ducks it and PUNCHES HIM SQUARE IN THE JAW, knocking Ruben against the wall. Wraps his hand around Ruben's throat. Puts a SWITCHBLADE to it.

MR. MAN
Leggo the pants.

RUBEN
No.

MR. MAN
Nigga, you know what the juglah vein is? Leggo the muh-fuckin' pants 'fore I cut you.

Ruben squeezes his eyes shut. Sticks his neck out. Ready. Mr. Man looks at him strangely -- *Is this kid for real?*

MR. MAN
You *wanna* die?

RUBEN
(scared now; hard to say)
No... but I'm not... sleeping in the street again.

Mr. Man stares at him. Kid's got nothing to lose. Closes the switchblade.

MR. MAN
Maybe you ain't even have to, little man.

Ruben opens his eyes, stares into Mr. Man's. Something's happened. Respect. A connection.

FADE OUT.

Over Black Title Card: Fall

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

People are dressed for slightly colder weather. The leaves are shriveling. Falling off. Change is coming. Ruben walks.

RONALD REAGAN (V.O.)
We cannot ignore the fact that even without our encouragement there has been and will continue to be repeated explosion against repression and dictatorships. Any system is inherently unstable that has no peaceful means to legitimize its leaders. In such cases, the very repressiveness of the state ultimately drives people to resist it, if necessary, by force.

INT. ALAMIDE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Alamide sits on the couch with KID LOW, 20s, trying to piece together a detachable RIFLE. They argue as each take slugs off a WINE BOTTLE.

KID LOW
I'm telling you, man, you can't force it.

ALAMIDE
It's not goin' in. You hear the click? You supposed to hear a click.

KID LOW
That's 'cause you're forcing it.

A KNOCK at the door. Alamide gets up.

ALAMIDE
Then *you* do it, motherfucker, 'cause I'm startin' to get frustrated with this shit.

He answers the door. It's Ruben.

ALAMIDE
Hey, man.

RUBEN
Wassup?

ALAMIDE
You, man, you. This my man Kid Low from around. This my man Ruben.

They exchange greetings.

RUBEN
(re: the rifle)
What's that?

ALAMIDE
.22, man. Problem is that shit come in two parts that don't like each other.

RUBEN
What're you gonna do with it?

ALAMIDE
You know that property I been on about for my school?

RUBEN
Yeah.

ALAMIDE
Too little, too muh-fuckin' late, man. They 'bout to rent that shit out. So I'm fixin' on that last sting, get my capital straight, you know? Got it all planned out. Kid Low, me, and a couple other niggas from up the Bronx.

RUBEN
What's that?

ALAMIDE
Bank robbery, man.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - ROOF - DAY

Abra walks from the STAIRWELL on to the EMPTY ROOF. From up here, a BLEAK VIEW OF THE CITY. She slowly walks to the edge, reaches it, looks down. A long drop.

She CLIMBS ON TO THE PARTITION, closes her eyes, cries. She can't do it. She turns around and notices, sitting in an obscured NOOK and staring at her... is Christine.

ABRA
What're you doin' up here?

CHRISTINE
Just lookin' around.

ABRA
You weren't gonna stop me?

CHRISTINE
(looking at sky)
We all gonna die pretty soon anyway. I figure you got a pretty good reason to go now, so... ain't none of my business anyway.

ABRA
I can't do it myself. I'm too scared. Will you... push me?

CHRISTINE
(thinks; then)
Nah. I don't wanna murder nobody. Leave that to the governments.

They stare at each other for what seems like an eternity.

CHRISTINE
You wanna go see a movie?

ABRA
What's playing?

CHRISTINE
Doesn't matter. Somethin' to do.

Abra ponders this, then --

ABRA
Okay.

Christine holds out her hand. Abra reaches for it.

INT. ALAMIDE'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Ruben watches Alamide pour hot water for tea.

RUBEN
You gonna go street-side anymore?

ALAMIDE
Nah, man. Once this thing goes down I'm through with all that shit. I'm'a be a teacher. 'Sides, I gotta lay low a while. These three niggas gimme this whole thing of smoke to sell, now they lookin' for my shit, you know?

RUBEN
Keep the money?

ALAMIDE
Nah man, I smoked that shit. Wha'm I gonna do? I got all this spare time, you know? Hold up a sec, I gotta bring this in to Daphne.

RUBEN
Takin' care of her. That's nice, man.

ALAMIDE
Shit, she nursed me through my worst heroin days. 'least I can do is see my woman through a cold.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Daphne lies in bed, blowing her nose. Cold medicines litter the night table. Alamide enters.

ALAMIDE
Sit up, baby. I got some tea here for you. Careful though, it's hot.

DAPHNE
Thanks, baby.

She takes a sip. He feels her head.

ALAMIDE
Feel like your temperature went down. You want some more aspirins? Cold compress or some shit?

DAPHNE
Nah, I'm alright.

ALAMIDE
Pretty soon you gonna have a servant doin' all this for you. Not that I mind doin' it, but you have one anyway, all the money I be makin'.

DAPHNE
I believe you, baby.

ALAMIDE
That's why I love you.

He kisses her lips.

DAPHNE
Don't. You'll catch my cold.

ALAMIDE
I don't care 'bout that shit, baby. You know that.

They kiss.

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL - DAY

Ruben walks up the street to the entrance carrying a plastic bag. Mr. Man exits. Ruben ignores him. Mr. Man stops him.

MR. MAN
Hey, little man. You didn't see me comin' out?

RUBEN
No.

MR. MAN
You sleepin'? 'Cause you been all cranky and shit lately.

RUBEN
I'm fine.

MR. MAN
I need you to run some shit out the track tomorrow. Make sure you around.

RUBEN
'kay.

Ruben is distant, the conversation strained. He heads into the hotel. Mr. Man watches him go... closely.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STABLES - DAY

Aesop and Francis are tending to horses. Ruben hands Aesop a PAPER BAG.

AESOP
Good, good. Billy Salazar's been on me about this shit for days.

RUBEN
Listen, Mr. Church. I wanted to let you know, I'm gettin' really close on Damascus.

Aesop gives Francis a look.

FRANCIS
(slight pleasure in this)
You wanna tell him, pop, or should I?

AESOP
She got brought out to Golden Gate Fields in San Fran last week for a Maiden Claiming, kid. Claimer shot up to ten and she got bought fast.

RUBEN
Wait. 'Cause I got close to eight now, and I could probably --

AESOP
She ain't even here. I really am sorry kid. Way these things go sometimes.

RUBEN
(long beat; takes it in)
Did... did she win her first race?

AESOP
No, but she'll win. Trainer's keepin' her out in Frisco and she's a hell of a mudder, so... but hey, I got somethin' maybe'll cheer you up, maybe not, I don't know.

FRANCIS
Pop, let's talk about this first in private, huh?

AESOP
Nothin' to talk about. He's a good kid, he don't know nobody.

RUBEN
What?

AESOP
There's a horse, mare, runnin' in a Maiden Special Weight in a few weeks, name's *Long 'n Tall*. Two years old, hasn't won a race, but me and Francis, we like her. She's solid, does a good seven furlong sprint. Capable, y'know?
(MORE)

AESOP (cont'd)
Owner, this guy Martin Vespa, don't know what he's got, don't really want her anymore, and if she don't win this race he's gonna sell her off for I'm guessin' no more than ten, eleven grand. You understand what I'm sayin' to you?

RUBEN
I don't have ten, and I don't know if I can get it by then, so...

AESOP
Well, here's the thing. You're a good kid, you been comin' out here a couple years now, you're honorable, and I know you do things on the side sometimes --

FRANCIS
Pop --

AESOP
Shut up, Francis -- but that kinda money... what I'm sayin', I could maybe put fifteen or so grand in your hand, few weeks time if you're up for pullin' a job that requires two sets 'a balls.

RUBEN
Are you serious?

AESOP
I'll be honest with you, there's a lot more money on my end of things, but as far as the fifteen goes, yeah, I'm serious. You got some time. Think about it.

RUBEN
What kinda job?

FRANCIS
(reluctantly)
It's an insurance thing.

AESOP
You're not afraid of needles, are you Ruben?

EXT. STREET - DAY

Ruben and Alamide walk.

ALAMIDE
Fiddeen G's? You serious, man?

RUBEN
Five up front, ten when it's over.

ALAMIDE
And what you have to do?

RUBEN
Go into this stable in Jersey, give a couple these horses a shot. They want someone to do it who's not known out there, y'know? Case anybody sees. But Halloween, probably no one be around anyway, so...

ALAMIDE
What's in the shot?

RUBEN
Dirty water. Like sewer water.

ALAMIDE
What'd you tell him?

RUBEN
I told him I'd think about it.

ALAMIDE
What's to think about, man? They puttin' your dream in the palm of your hand.

RUBEN
Yeah, but I mean, we do this crazy shit out here, scare people sometimes, but I don't wanna kill anything, man.

ALAMIDE
I ain't never even stuck nobody, but shit, fifteen grand? Some horses? I'd torch the motherfuckers for two.

RUBEN
I got seven and change saved up. With all this shit Mr. Man's doin' now, next few parties, I could maybe have it in six months anyway...

Alamide notices STROM & MALIK across the street. Points them out to Ruben.

ALAMIDE
Yeah, uh, let's walk back the other way, man. I don't wanna get into this here right now.

INT. RUBEN'S ROOM - DAY

Ruben enters, goes to the bed. LIFTS UP THE MATTRESS --

THE LOCK BOX IS GONE. He pushes the entire mattress off the bed. Nothing.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Ruben frantically runs to a door. Pounds on it.

RUBEN
MR. MAN... !

No answer. He kicks the door, bounds back down the hall. Each person he passes...

RUBEN
You seen Mr. Man?

... and each person shakes their head.

INT. ANOTHER HALLWAY - SAME

Ruben runs up to a door. Bangs on it.

NOEL (O.C.)
What the fuck --

RUBEN
OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR!

She does. Ruben bursts in.

RUBEN
Why'd you tell him? Why?

NOEL
I didn't --

RUBEN
So what, my money just disappeared? He took everything I ever saved. EVERYTHING! 'Cause you opened your big fucking mouth when all I wanted to do was help you.

Suddenly, a VOICE from the doorway.

MR. MAN (O.S.)
She didn't say a word, little man.

Ruben spins around.

MR. MAN
She jus' asked me one night, real innocent, 'bout how much I think you mighta saved after all these years, all these parties. I said I never really thought about it, but it did get me all curious and shit. You know you got almost eight G's in that little box? Lotta scratch be keepin' under a bed. Niggas kill you for less than that 'round here.

RUBEN
Gimme it back. It's mine.

MR. MAN
That's right, it *is* yours. And don't worry, I ain't gonna spend it, little man. That all goes into the stallion fund. I'm just gonna hold on to it 'til I feel you've regained my trust. Yeah, *trust*. Aspect of our relationship that's been significantly lacking of late. Loyalty, little man. I just don't know where your head's at these days.

RUBEN
That's the sum total of every millionth of a fucking percent I earned busting my ass for you, and some of it's from jobs you didn't have anything to do with. You can't just go into my room and take what's not yours --

MR. MAN
Whatchoo talkin' '*can't*'? I did. I been payin' for that room and everything in it since day one. Which *makes* everything in the motherfucker mine. Seven thousand dollars cash just lyin' under a motherfuckin' bed? As your principle benefactor, I'm'a have to be the one tell you, that just don't make good business sense, little man. But now that your assets all temporarily frozen, maybe you'll start to reevaluate some of them fucked up thoughts you maybe been having lately.

Ruben fumes -- tries to speak, but can't...

MR. MAN
Don't challenge me, little man. You *can* make this right.

Ruben storms out.

INT. ALAMIDE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Alamide answers the front door. Ruben.

RUBEN
You go in on it with me, I'll give you five. I'd give you more, but I need at least ten for the runner. Whaddaya say?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PATHE TRAIN - HALLOWEEN NIGHT

FOLKS IN COSTUME litter the train. Ruben and Alamide sit quietly, staring out the window as the city gives way to NEW JERSEY.

EXT. PATHE STATION - JERSEY - NIGHT

Ruben and Alamide step off the PLATFORM. Francis waits by a CAR in the lot. They approach him.

FRANCIS
Fuck is this?

RUBEN
Friend of mine. He's cool. Get it done faster this way.

FRANCIS
S'posed to be just you.

RUBEN
He doesn't know anybody. He's cool.

ALAMIDE
Yeah, man, I'm cool.

FRANCIS
Get in the car.

INT. CAR - SAME

Francis, behind the wheel, checks out a restless-looking Alamide in the REARVIEW. Francis shakes his head.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - SAME

The car comes to a stop next to a FIELD. Quiet out here.

INT. CAR - SAME

Francis kills the ignition.

FRANCIS
Stables are at the other end of the field. It's unlocked, so you won't have any problem.

He hands Ruben a SHEET OF PAPER.

FRANCIS
Names of the horses are on this so you don't forget; Domine, Harpsichord, Barnstormer. They're on the stalls.

Francis reaches into the back seat, grabs a SATCHEL. Opens it. THREE SYRINGES, all filled.

FRANCIS
One each, doesn't matter where, wherever's easiest. Now, you gotta remember this, this is important. Three motions. One quick, two slow, three quick. One -- jab it in quick, two -- *slowly* push the plunger, otherwise you get air bubbles, block an artery, and three -- quick pull out. Understand?

RUBEN
Yeah.

ALAMIDE
Don't worry, man. I got experience with needles.

FRANCIS
Big fuckin' surprise.

EXT. FIELD - SAME

A LARGE EXPANSE OF GRASS, barely illuminated. Ruben and Alamide make their way across to the STABLES at the far end.

INT. STABLES - SAME

Ruben and Alamide enter quietly. Walk past all the STALLS. Alamide reaches one that says *DOMINE.*

ALAMIDE
Yo, I got one, man.

Ruben reaches him, stares at the horse. A beautiful creature.

ALAMIDE
You wanna do it?

RUBEN
Yeah, I gotta get one outta the way.

Ruben pops the cap off his syringe.

ALAMIDE
Damn, that's beautiful, man. Shame. Worth more to these motherfuckers dead than alive though, I guess.

Ruben approaches the horse, who is calm, peaceful. He stares at *DOMINE.* Swallows hard.

ALAMIDE
One, two, three, man. Easy, peasy, Chinesey.

Ruben brings the syringe ever closer to the horse's skin. He looks up into it's EYES. Closer... closer... and... STOPS --

ALAMIDE
You want me to do it?

RUBEN
No. I don't want either of us to. I don't wanna kill 'em.

ALAMIDE
What're you talkin' 'bout, man? Why we come all the way out here?

RUBEN
I don't know, man, but please, I don't wanna do this.

ALAMIDE
What about the money, man?

RUBEN
I'll give it back, I don't care.

ALAMIDE
I can't give you back that five, man. I need that money.

RUBEN
It's okay. I'll get 'em the other five back. I just can't let 'em do this to me, man. Just please be with me on this. I can't let 'em do it to me.

Alamide stares at him. Can see this is important to Ruben.

ALAMIDE
Awright, yeah. Just so's you know, I gotta keep the five, man.

RUBEN
I'll work it out.

ALAMIDE
Well, let's get the fuck outta here then. I don't wanna stay in Jersey any longer than I have to.

EXT. ROAD - CAR - SAME

Francis sees Ruben and Alamide approaching from the field. Notices the FULL SYRINGES.

FRANCIS
Fuck is this?

RUBEN
I can't do it, Francis. I'm sorry.

FRANCIS
Whaddaya mean, you're sorry? I don't need empty fuckin' apologies, Ruben, I need empty syringes. You go back and you do it.

RUBEN
I'll give you back your money.

FRANCIS
You don't have to gimme back the money, just give 'em to him...
(points to Alamide)
... he ain't a fuckin' horse pussy like you, right? You do it, it's yours, the whole fifteen.

Alamide is speechless. Thinks hard about this. Looks over at Ruben, whose head is down. Finally, back to Francis --

ALAMIDE
Nah, man.

FRANCIS
This is un-fuckin'-believable. I told pop we shouldn't bring your pussy ass into this.

RUBEN
Why don't you go do it, Francis? See how easy it is to kill something, man.

FRANCIS
You wanna see how easy it is?

Francis pulls a PISTOL from his belt. Points it at them.

FRANCIS
Now you turn around and do this thing like you said you would. There's no options here, Ruben. I don't step foot in that field, understand? You do what you said you were gonna do or I'm gonna shoot you and throw you in my trunk.

RUBEN
I've done enough shit. I've done enough.

Ruben is visibly coming undone. Cracking.

ALAMIDE
Ruben, man, maybe I should just go back there --

FRANCIS
See that? Now, you know you got a fucked up situation when a nigger starts makin' sense.

ALAMIDE
Who you callin' nigger, you I-talian, fat-ass, honky motherfucker?

FRANCIS
You're both gonna go back and you're gonna do it fast, and when it's over my pop's gonna hear about this bullshit, and it'll be the last time we do business with you or your lowlife nigger boss.

RUBEN
You're gonna tell Mr. Man about this?

FRANCIS
Fuckin'-A right. None of you bitches is trustworthy for shit.
(MORE)

FRANCIS (cont'd)
Now I'm'unna count to three and then I'm gonna shoot anyone who's still on the road and my pop's gonna buy me a fuckin' car for it, understand?
(beat)
One...

Francis holds the gun on Ruben who remains stock still.

FRANCIS
Two...

Francis cocks the gun. Alamide stares at it, nervously.

FRANCIS
This is your last chance, stupids, 'cause I ain't countin' any higher.

Ruben SPITS IN HIS FACE. Francis wipes it off, levels the gun at Ruben.

FRANCIS
You lowlife piece 'a --

Alamide LUNGES AT FRANCIS -- PLUNGES A SYRINGE CLEAR THROUGH HIS HAND --

He screams, drops the gun which goes off. Ruben scrambles to pick it up as the screaming Francis drops to his knees, pulls out the syringe. Alamide watches it all in a state of shock.

Ruben, crazed and desperate look in his eye, aims the gun at Francis, who cries like a baby.

FRANCIS
You stuck the fuckin' needle through my hand, man.

ALAMIDE
Oh shit. I'm sorry, man. You was gonna shoot Ruben.

FRANCIS
You guys are in so much fuckin' trouble. Gotta get me to a doctor.

RUBEN
Shut up, Francis --

FRANCIS
You gotta drive me to a hospital, man. My hand's gonna get infected.

RUBEN
I gotta think...

ALAMIDE
Did I do right? He was gonna shoot you, man.

FRANCIS
I wasn't really gonna shoot you. C'mon, my hand is killin' me here. Just drive me to the hospital, we'll make it all right tomorrow.

RUBEN
Stop talking, Francis. Just stop fucking talking --

FRANCIS
First of all, I wasn't really gonna shoot you. Second of all, if I was it was for not doin' something you -

BLAM! Ruben snaps -- SHOOTS HIM --

RUBEN
SHUT UP! SHUT THE FUCK UP!

BAM! Shoots again.

RUBEN
I DIDN'T AGREE TO THIS. I DIDN'T AGREE TO ANY OF THIS. THIS FUCKIN' WORLD FELL ON ME! SUNOFA -- FUCKING -- BITCH!!!

BAM -- BAM -- BAM. Empties the chamber into the lifeless Francis, crying all the way. Keeps pulling the trigger after it's emptied -- CLICK -- CLICK -- CLICK --

Alamide watches, silent, dumbstruck. Ruben collapses. Drops the gun. Weeps.

ALAMIDE
(hushed tone)
You did it, man. Now we got to go.

RUBEN
I can't... take this... anymore...

Alamide puts his arm around him. Pulls him away, as Ruben whimpers...

FADE OUT.

INT. RUBEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ruben PACKS A SMALL SUITCASE. Not much in it.

EXT. RACETRACK - STABLES - DAY

Aesop brushes a horse peeking out of its stable.

JIM, a large man wearing shades, edges up to him. Whispers something in his ear. A look of disbelief crosses Aesop's face before he --

GOES BALLISTIC -- KICKS DOORS, THROWS BENCHES, SCREAMS --

INT. BANK - DAY

Alamide and his three Cohorts scan the layout of the place, staring at VIDEO CAMERAS, etc.

CUT TO:

DEPOSIT WINDOW

MR. MAN hands the teller a deposit slip followed by an envelope stuffed with cash.

MA LOVE sits close by on a couch reading a NEWSPAPER. The HEADLINE reads "*SALLY RIDE: FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN IN SPACE.*". She stares out the window, up at the sky. Possibilities.

EXT. STREET - SHOP - DAY

Christine sorts through racks of clothing next to Abra, who wears a blank expression.

Abra notices MOTHERS AND THEIR YOUNG SONS & DAUGHTERS. She swallows hard. A deep and bitter sadness.

FADE TO:

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL - DUSK

It's starting to rain. Hard.

A dark blue LINCOLN pulls up to the curb. Aesop steps out followed by Jim and two other MEN. They head into the hotel, gravely. All business.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - LOBBY - SAME

Aesop and crew slice through the RIFFRAFF up to the DESKMAN, who sits behind the COUNTER watching the game show *Press Your Luck.*

AESOP
You know which room Ruben's in? Or Mr. Man?

DESKMAN
Nah, Officer, I ain't never heard those names.

AESOP
We ain't cops. They told us to meet 'em here, but we forgot to ask what room.

DESKMAN
Well, they ain't here anyway, man. They gone out, so...
(back to T.V)
No Whammies, no whammies -- STOP! Whammy's a nasty motherfucker.

AESOP
You know where they gone out to?

DESKMAN
Nah.

AESOP
Know anybody who might?

Aesop lays a FIFTY DOLLAR BILL on the counter. The Deskman's eyes widen.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - ROLAND'S ROOM - SAME

Roland, nose wrapped in gauze, is in the middle of an animated conversation with Frank.

FRANK
Sugar Ray's a bitch, talkin' my eye hurts and shit.

ROLAND
Nigga, he de-attached his muh-fuckin' retina.
(MORE)

ROLAND (cont'd)
My man had a 32-1 record 'fore he retired his *own* ass, with 23 knockouts. He *gonna* come back.

FRANK
Bullshit. I'd like to see his ass up against Marvin Hagler. His shit'd go down, stupid quick.

ROLAND
Nigga, they ain't even the same weight class.

KNOCK at the door.

ROLAND
Who?

AESOP (O.C.)
Is that Roland?

ROLAND
Yeah. Who you?

AESOP (O.C.)
Aesop Church. I'm a friend of Ruben's. You know were I might find him?

ROLAND
Nah, man. I don't know.

AESOP (O.C.)
Could you open the door a second, please?

ROLAND
(to Frank)
Man, why these niggas always comin' around, fuckin' with me? I gotta get my shit unlisted, somethin'.

Frank pulls a GUN out of the dresser, tosses it to Roland. Roland OPENS THE DOOR A CRACK. Peeks out at Aesop and his goons.

ROLAND
Oh, shit. What's this, a mafia convention? I told you, I don't know where Ruben's at?

AESOP
How 'bout Mr. Man?

ROLAND
What I look like? The yellow pages?

Aesop holds up a HUNDRED DOLLAR BILL.

ROLAND
Man, get outta here with that shit.

Roland slams the door in their face. Turns to Frank.

ROLAND
Tryin' to get me to sell my niggas out. You believe that shit?

Suddenly, the DOOR BREAKS OPEN -- knocks Roland to the ground, where his nose starts bleeding again. He drops the gun, clutches his face as AESOP AND CREW STEP INSIDE.

AESOP
(to Frank)
Don't move.

FRANK
Wasn't goin' to...

Roland squeals in pain as he's dragged to the couch.

INT. BARBIZON HOTEL - SUITE - NIGHT

Mr. Man greets various WALL-STREET TYPES as they arrive.

Ma Love, Abra, Christine and Noel greet them all, cozy up to them.

Ruben wanders aimlessly, occasionally making eye-contact with Noel. He walks over to Mr. Man.

RUBEN
Can I talk to you?

MR. MAN
I want to talk to you, too, little man. Things been fucked up 'tween us lately, I know. We gotta squash that shit, but not right now.

RUBEN
I gotta leave.

MR. MAN
I need you here, little man. You go on back to the Diamond in a half. I'm through here, we have us a heart to heart. But don't go nowhere just yet.

Mr. Man heads off to greet someone, leaving behind a frustrated Ruben.

INT. BLUE LINCOLN - NIGHT

Aesop and crew roll through the rainy streets in eerie silence.

INT. ALAMIDE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alamide, Kid Low and their two Cohorts play with their shotguns. Argue their plan.

COHORT #1
I ain't spray-paintin' my license.

ALAMIDE
Then we'll put tape over that shit.

KID LOW
Yo Deal, man, gimme the gun. You gonna break that shit.

DEAL
Nah, man, it don't wanna lock.

Daphne comes out of the bedroom.

DAPHNE
Alamide? You wanna come in here?

ALAMIDE
Wassup, baby?

DAPHNE
Just come in here, please.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Alamide follows Daphne inside. She sits on the bed, forlorn.

DAPHNE
I don't know about this thing tomorrow.

ALAMIDE
Baby, we talked about this. I gotta do this shit now, else I'm'a lose out on my place.

DAPHNE
I know, but we got this money here Ruben left --

ALAMIDE
Yeah, I got five. So? Don't go thinkin' whatchoo thinkin', Daphne. Cause number one, it ain't all mine, and number two, it's not enough.

DAPHNE
Baby, I'm scared you won't come back to me this time. Or you ain't planned it out enough.

Alamide kneels by her feet, tenderly.

ALAMIDE
That's why we out there goin' over it and over it. Baby, I know it's big, I know it's a risk, but we ain't get out the game I gotta be lookin' over my shoulder all the time. This one last, baby, and we out. We move. Open up a school --

He does a quick, cool breakdance move. Pops and locks. Daphne laughs.

ALAMIDE
Make you proud.

He puts his head in her lap. She strokes it.

DAPHNE
I love you.

ALAMIDE
This the last, baby. We almost there.

INT. BARBIZON HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Aesop and crew enter the hotel, head for the elevators.

INT. SUITE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME

Noel steps out of a BEDROOM, as the BUSINESSMAN inside pulls on his shirt. She closes the door behind her, heads toward the STAIRCASE --

Notices RUBEN, alone in a room, sitting on the bed, staring down at the floor.

INT. ROOM - SAME

Noel enters. Ruben looks up.

NOEL
What're you doing in here?

RUBEN
Waiting for you to finish.

NOEL
Why?

RUBEN
I'm leaving. I did something and now I have to go away. For good. I just wanted to give you something before I left... so I could live with myself.

NOEL
I don't underst --

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a FOLDED PAPER. Hands it to her. She unfolds it.

INT. SUITE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Mr. Man OPENS THE DOOR. It's Aesop and crew.

MR. MAN
(genuinely surprised)
Mr. Church. What you doin' here, man?
(re: Crew)
Who's this?

AESOP
Sorry to interrupt the party, Mr. Man. I salute your ambition, by the way.

MR. MAN
Well, that's fine, but this here's a private party. You understand.

AESOP
Five minutes of your time, and we'll be on our way.

INT. SUITE - UPSTAIRS ROOM - SAME

Noel starts at the unfolded paper. On it, AN ADDRESS.

RUBEN
I left something for you. That's where it is. Something you might need, you ever decide you're not happy here anymore.

NOEL
Ruben, I already told you --

RUBEN
I don't wanna hear it again. It's there. For a while, at least.

Abra walks in. To Ruben:

ABRA
Mr. Man wants you downstairs.

INT. SUITE - DOWNSTAIRS - SAME

Ruben walks down the stairs. Mr. Man, Aesop and his crew come into sight, stare up at him. He freezes. Stares at Mr. Man whose face is stern and sad.

AESOP
Hello, Ruben.

Ruben stands stock still at the bottom of the stares, silent.

MR. MAN
C'mon over here, little man.

Ruben proceeds toward Mr. Man with caution, Aesop and crew eyeing him with intensity.

MR. MAN
You pull a job for this man?

Ruben stops a few feet away from them. Mr. Man meets him halfway.

MR. MAN
I asked you a question.

Ruben stands silently, staring at Aesop. Suddenly --

THWAP -- Mr. Man SLAPS HIM. Ruben recovers, stares up at him.

MR. MAN
Did you pull a job for this man?

RUBEN
(long pause; then)
No.

Mr. Man stares him square in the eye -- LOOKING FOR THE LIE. Finally, turns to Aesop.

MR. MAN
You satisfied? He said no. I believe him.

AESOP
Ain't the question. Where's the money, Ruben?

MR. MAN
What money?

AESOP
Fifteen-thousand dollars he stole from the trunk of my dead son's car.

MR. MAN
(disbelief)
Fifteen-*thousand?*

AESOP
That's right.

MR. MAN
You steal this man's money, Ruben?

RUBEN
No.

AESOP
He's fulla shit.

MR. MAN
Hold up now.

Mr. Man stares hard into Ruben's eyes... searching... and finds -- THE LIE.

Swallows hard, exhales. All the life drains out of him. Looks down, can't even look Ruben in the eye anymore.

MR. MAN
If I can't control you... I can't protect you.

He turns his back on Ruben. Walks away. Ruben watches him go with great difficulty.

MR. MAN
It's outta my hands, little man.

Mr. Man turns to Aesop. Nods.

AESOP
Time to go, kid.

Ruben looks around the room.

AESOP
Ain't no place to run, Ruben. Let's make this easy.

Ruben takes one last look to Mr. Man, but his back is turned. Ruben heads over to Aesop and crew.

AESOP
Attaboy.

Jim takes him by the arm, leads him to the door. Aesop locks eyes with Mr. Man. Nods. Mr. Man reluctantly nods back, resigned.

AESOP
Okay.

Aesop and crew exit with Ruben.

Abra and Noel watch the slumped over Mr. Man fix himself a drink.

Ma Love and a BUSINESSMAN come out of a room. Ma Love notices Mr. Man looking despondent.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - SAME

Aesop and crew lead Ruben down the long hall.

AESOP
(simmering fury)
I offered you more than most people make in a lifetime on the street. All you had to do was your job.
(to Jim)
What do I keep sayin' about the problem with these kids today?

JIM
No work ethic.

AESOP
Francis had a work ethic. My boy had heart. And you shot him in the fuckin' back, like an animal.

RUBEN
I didn't shoot --

Aesop loses it. Throws Ruben up against the wall.

AESOP
Don't add insult to injury, you piece 'a shit. Where's my money?

RUBEN
I don't know.

Aesop leans in close. Whispers dangerously.

AESOP
When we're through with you tonight, you're gonna be beggin' for a chance to tell me...

INT. SUITE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Mr. Man mills around struggling with his own thoughts. Ma Love and Abra stare at him.

MR. MAN
What?
(no response)
Get on upstairs.
(no response)
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
He ain't my motherfuckin' son, shit.

ABRA
You just gonna let 'em take him away, 'cause they say so?

Mr. Man starts to argue. Stops. Thinks.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Mr. Man BURSTS OUT OF THE SUITE -- HEADS DOWN THE HALLWAY followed by Ma Love and Abra --

INT. HOTEL ELEVATORS - SAME

Ruben, Aesop and Crew stand on the elevator as the DOORS CLOSE. Suddenly --

AN ARM STOPS IT -- THE DOOR SLIDES BACK OPEN, revealing --

Mr. Man with Ma Love and Abra behind him.

JIM
What the fuck --?

Mr. Man reaches in, YANKS RUBEN OUT OF THE ELEVATOR --

Guides Ruben behind him -- the three of them forming a protective shield in front --

AESOP
HEY, HEY --

Aesop and Crew jump out of the elevator, which closes behind them.

MR. MAN
You leave him with me for a couple days, I find out where your money's at, Mr. Church. We resolve this the Martin Luther motherfucking King way.

AESOP
This goes beyond money, Mr. Man. He *shot my son*, you understand?

MR. MAN
I understand what we got here's a family crisis, and I promise to deal with it in a just and severe manner, get back to you directly. But I can't just let you take him.

AESOP
You're sure about that.

MR. MAN
Did I stutter?

AESOP
Then we got ourselves a problem.

Mr. Man smirks. A glint in his eyes.

MR. MAN
Ain't no problem can't be solved.

INT. ALAMIDE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alamide stands by the open door. Slaps Kid Low's hand goodbye.

ALAMIDE
Awright man, tomorrow four o'clock.

He closes the door, exhales, exhausted. He turns, walks over to Daphne, sitting on the couch with her dog in her lap.

DAPHNE
Tired, baby?

ALAMIDE
Yeah.

DAPHNE
I gotta walk Daddy.

ALAMIDE
I'll go with you. Lemme get my windbreaker.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Alamide and Daphne walk the dog down the block, holding an umbrella over them. Alamide rattles off a list like a kid in a candy store --

ALAMIDE
I'm'a buy you a Lamborghini, I'm'a buy you a VCR, get rid 'a that Betamax shit for good. I'm'a buy you a house. Shit, I'm'a buy the motherfuckin' dog a house.

DAPHNE
Aw, baby...

CUT TO:

ACROSS THE STREET

ADEO, STROM and MALIK hanging on a corner, hoods up. Malik notices Alamide. Taps Adeo on the shoulder.

MALIK
Yo, Adeo. Check it out, man.

Adeo notices Alamide and Daphne step into a BODEGA.

ADEO
I'll be fucked. Nigga stole smoke.

INT. BODEGA - SAME

Daphne walks up and down the aisles with the dog. Alamide stands at the front Counter with the CLERK.

ALAMIDE
You got any Strawberry Boone's?

CLERK
Cherry okay?

ALAMIDE
I guess, that's all you got.

The Clerk reaches behind, pulls out a BOONE'S CHERRY WINE.

EXT. STREET - SAME

Alamide and Daphne walk out of the Bodega, head down the street. The mood is playful between them.

They pass an ALLEY, when suddenly --

Alamide is GRABBED FROM BEHIND -- KNIFE HELD TO HIS THROAT --

DAPHNE IS GRABBED -- HAND OVER HER MOUTH --

They're pushed into the alley. The Dog BARKS AND JUMPS MADLY.

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

The alley is desolate. Adeo pushes Alamide hard against the wall with the knife at his throat.

ADEO
'member me, motherfucker?

ALAMIDE
Let her go, man. She didn't do nothin'.

Daphne struggles against Malik, as her dog barks and snaps at him. Strom KICKS THE DOG IN THE HEAD.

It whimpers and backs off.

ADEO
Nigga steal somethin' from me, nigga get somethin' stole in return.
(to Malik)
Go on, man.

Malik pushes Daphne against the opposite wall, hand over her mouth -- TEARS HER SHIRT -- UNZIPS HIS FLY --

ALAMIDE
NO!

Alamide struggles hard, but knife point is at his throat. A single tear rolls down his cheek. Adeo moves his face close, taunting.

ADEO
Yeah... we gonna take turns...

INT. HOTEL - ELEVATORS - SAME

BIG STANDOFF.

Ruben, standing behind Mr. Man, Abra and Ma Love facing Aesop and Crew. Ma Love and Abra mouth off -- all argue at once --

ABRA
Comin' up here in your cheap-ass suits...

MA LOVE
... thinkin' you can just do whatcha please...

Ma Love GETS UP IN AESOP'S FACE -- SHOUTING. Jim pushes her back.

JIM
Just back the fuck up...

MA LOVE
(swats his hand away)
Get your hands off-a me.

In the ensuing chaos, Aesop and Crew don't notice as MR. MAN EDGES RUBEN INTO AN OPEN ELEVATOR BEHIND HIM --

As the the doors close, Aesop notices --

AESOP
HEY --

Aesop and Crew lunge to get through them, but Mr. Man, Abra and Ma Love stand in their way --

AESOP
FUCKING WHORES!

Ma Love slaps Aesop. He BACKHANDS HER.

MR. MAN
Ain't nobody touch my bitches but me, motherfucker.

He POPS AESOP WITH A HARD RIGHT, and suddenly IT'S AN ALL-OUT BRAWL!

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - SAME

Ruben exits the elevator. Makes a beeline for the doors.

EXT. HOTEL - SAME

Ruben comes out, runs down the street. Comes to a SUBWAY ENTRANCE. Descends into it.

INT. HOTEL - ELEVATORS - SAME

The brawl continues. Mr. Man and his Girls vs. Aesop's Crew. Fists fly.

BING -- an ELEVATOR DOOR OPENS --

Aesop tries to jump into it, but HE'S PULLED BACK INTO THE FRAY by Mr. Man --

Abra chokes Jim -- he slaps her -- she bites his arm --

He screams. PULLS A GUN -- LEVELS IT AT HER --

Mr. Man immediately PULLS HIS OWN GUN -- AIMS AT JIM --

The other Men in Aesop's Crew PULLS GUNS, aim at Mr. Man -- except Aesop, who tries to calm the situation --

It's a MEXICAN STANDOFF.

AESOP
Awright, everybody just take a breath. This is some seriously unnecesarry bullshit.
(to Mr. Man)
Here's what's gonna happen. We're gonna put these things down, get in the elevator and go, and that's it. Okay? We go, we're done. How's that?

MR. MAN
That's fine, Mr. Church. All this noise in such a fine establishment? Don't seem right.

AESOP
(to Crew)
Awright, put 'em away.

Mr. Man continues to hold up his piece as Aesop's Crew LOWERS THEIR GUNS, and without warning --

BAM! -- MR. MAN SHOOTS JIM -- BAM! BAM! -- SHOOTS THE OTHER TWO --

Jim POPS ONE OFF before he goes down -- HITS ABRA -- Mr. Man finishes him, leaving only Aesop --

Mr. Man levels the gun at a horrified Aesop.

AESOP
(pleading)
Don't --

BAM! -- No hesitation -- Aesop goes down --

Mr. Man turns on his heels and heads out of the elevator banks as MA LOVE KNEELS BY THE DYING ABRA.

MA LOVE
Wha'bout Abra?

Mr. Man ignores her. Ma Love looks down at Abra, who SMILES.

ABRA
(weakly; smiling)
S'okay. I'm gonna see my baby...

Mr. Man runs down the hallway towards the suite, as CURIOUS GUESTS PEEK OUT OF THEIR ROOMS AT THE COMMOTION --

INT. SUITE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Noel is in the DOORWAY as Mr. Man comes rushing in. The BUSINESSMEN are nervously pulling on their clothes.

MR. MAN
Party's over.
(to Noel & Christine)
Get your shit.

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

Alamide's head is held back by Adeo's knife, as he painfully watches Malik have his way with Daphne. Daphne moans in agony. Alamide can't take anymore --

ALAMIDE
Baby, no...

He SMACKS THE KNIFE AWAY FROM HIS THROAT, leaving a gash. Lunges at Daphne --

Adeo cuts him off -- SNICK! -- SHANKS HIM TWICE IN THE STOMACH. Alamide drops, clutching his bleeding stomach.

ADEO
Now we even...
(to Malik)
Yo, leave the bitch, man.

MALIK
Hold up, man. I'm almost there.

ADEO
I said c'mon. *Now*.

Cursing, Malik pulls away from Daphne, zips up his fly, as she FALLS IN A HEAP TO THE GROUND -- they all RUN OFF --

Injured, Alamide crawls to Daphne, who's only semi-conscious.

ALAMIDE
Aw, no, no... baby.
(weakly calling)
... help...

Alamide shakily GETS ON HIS FEET, clutching his wound -- STUMBLES OUT OF THE ALLEY --

EXT. STREET - SAME

Alamide stumbles on to the sidewalk, caked with grime and blood. Disoriented. He reaches out to a TEENAGE COUPLE --

ALAMIDE
Please...

They shy away from him, barely glancing. He shuffles further down the street, barely standing, then --

STRAIGHT INTO TRAFFIC

-- where he's CAUGHT IN THE HEADLIGHTS OF A CAR HEADING STRAIGHT FOR HIM --

The BRAKES SCREECH, but SKID OVER THE WET SURFACE, and --

SMACK -- Alamide is PROPELLED INTO THE AIR -- comes CRASHING ON TO THE PAVEMENT -- MANGLED -- A SINGLE WORD ESCAPES --

ALAMIDE
(meekly)
... mama...

-- and he's gone.

EXT. HOTEL - SAME

A SQUAD OF COP CARS illuminate the night. POLICE rush into the lobby as --

Mr. Man and his three Girls sneak out a SIDE ENTRANCE. They rush down the block.

MR. MAN
(to Noel)
You talk to him?

CHRISTINE
Maybe he went back to the Diamond.

MR. MAN
Am I talkin' to you? He ain't go back to no motherfuckin' Diamond.
(to Noel)
I asked you a question, girl. You talk to him?

Hesitantly, Noel pulls out the FOLDED PAPER. Mr. Man snatches it from her, unfolds it.

EXT. SUBWAY ENTRANCE - DOWNTOWN - SAME

Ruben bounds up out of the subway. Heads down the street, glancing around nervously. He ROUNDS A CORNER, comes to --

THE SCENE OF AN ACCIDENT

-- where a CROWD surrounds the AMBULANCE and COP CAR. A COVERED BODY is loaded into the ambulance. Ruben passes the crowd, paying no attention.

INT. ALAMIDE'S BUILDING - STAIRWELL - SAME

Ruben jumps up the stairs. Comes to Alamide's door. Bangs.

RUBEN
Yo, Alamide.

He waits. No answer. Bangs harder.

RUBEN
Alamide. It's Ruben. Open up.

Nothing. Thinks a minute, then -- PULLS OUT A TINY LOCK-PICK & PIN -- sticks it in the lock --

RUBEN
(under his breath)
Sorry, man.

INT. ALAMIDE'S APARTMENT - SAME

Ruben opens the door. Enters. Lights are on.

RUBEN
Alamide? Daphne?

Still no answer. Closes the door behind him. Starts SEARCHING THE LIVING ROOM. Nothing. Exits into the --

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

-- searches UNDER THE BED -- the CLOSET -- sweeps his hand high atop the closet, PULLS OUT --

-- a LEATHER SATCHEL. He plops it down on the bed. Opens it -- MONEY!! STACKS OF HUNDREDS. He takes out a SMALL STACK, starts counting it out.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben WRITES A NOTE. Finishes. Lays it on the bed next to a small stack of hundreds. The note reads: *Alamide, Left the five. Thanks. Ruben.*

He exits.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - ABRA'S ROOM - SAME

Christine walks around the room, looking over all of Danny's things. Wistful. She looks over the whole room. Pulls a BAGGIE OF THC from her pocket --

She rips open the baggie. Thinks a moment, then -- DUMPS THE ENTIRE CONTENTS IN HER MOUTH. Swallows.

CLOSE ON CHRISTINE

SCREEEEEAAAAAAAAMMMMM. An unholy shriek.

INT. ALAMIDE'S BUILDING - STAIRWELL - SAME

Ruben exits the apartment. Starts down the staircase. Jumps the stairs three at a time. Comes to the final flight, and --

FREEZES at the top of the landing. Looks down.

MR. MAN stands at the bottom with Noel behind him. Points at the bag in Ruben's hand. An eerie calm about him --

MR. MAN
What's in the bag, little man?

RUBEN
Nothing.

MR. MAN
I'm'a take a wild guess and say fifteen-thousand dollars.

Ruben takes his time, looks at Noel then back to Mr. Man.

RUBEN
Ten.

MR. MAN
Where's the other five.

RUBEN
Doesn't belong to me.

MR. MAN
None of it belongs to you.

Ruben stares down at Noel. Wheels turning in his mind.

RUBEN
Let us go.

MR. MAN
Let *us* go?

Mr. Man glances from Noel back to Ruben.

MR. MAN
I just saved your ass. You be dead right now, it wasn't for me. Fact, you woulda been dead a long time ago, wasn't for me. You wanna go, go. I ain't stand in your way, but she don't wanna go with you, and you got to accept that shit. You don't believe me?
(to Noel)
You got your own free will, do whatever you like, baby. You wanna go?

She's silent. Head down. Ashamed. He caresses her cheek. Tilts her head to him, stares deeply into her eyes.

MR. MAN
S'okay. Whole world out there waitin' to be seen. You wanna go? Leave me alone down here?

NOEL
(after a long beat)
No.

MR. MAN
(back to Ruben)
Okay?

RUBEN
She's scared.

MR. MAN
She family, and family don't abandon each other when times is hard. You wanna go, go, but you ain't breakin' up the family. And you ain't leavin' with that bag, little man. Way I see it, tonight I gave you back your life, and the price on that life is ten thousand, good for one minute only.

Ruben is visibly scared. No way out, he reaches in his jacket, PULLS OUT HIS GUN -- points it down to find --

Mr. Man has pulled his own gun. Points it up at Ruben.

MR. MAN
Yeah, I got one, too. That's funny. I'm'a have to take your life with the same gun I used to save it.
(turns serious)
Gimme the bag, little man. We call it a day.

EXT. STREET - ACCIDENT SCENE - SAME

Two DETECTIVES, HAL and KILSTEDT, confer, as the crowd of onlookers thickens --

HAL
Neither of 'em were carryin' any identification, so --

KILSTEDT
What about the girl?

HAL
Chrissake, she was raped. She's in shock.
(MORE)

HAL (cont'd)
Can't get two words outta her. They're takin' her uptown to psych.

An OFFICER runs up to them.

OFFICER
Detectives? I got a homeless guy down here says he knew the corpse.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Hal and Kilstedt question the HOMELESS GUY, 50s.

HOMELESS GUY
The boy's name was, I think, Alama-something. Girl's name was Daphne. Used to sleep against their building, the boy'd come out now and again, throw me a dollar or two. Nice boy...

KILSTEDT
Which building?

HOMELESS GUY
Just up the block. I can show you.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - ABRA'S ROOM - SAME

Christine tears through the room, screaming and running from the HORRIBLE VISIONS that pursue and plague her. Runs into the --

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

Tears through the cabinet under the sink, grabbing AMMONIA, PEROXIDE, various HOUSEHOLD CLEANERS --

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Christine runs back in. Dumps the cleaning products all over the room. Then all over herself. Pulls some MATCHES from her pocket.

Lights one and throws it down. The CARPET GOES UP IN A BLAZE.

INT. ALAMIDE'S BUILDING - STAIRWELL - SAME

Ruben and Mr. Man square off at the top and bottom of the staircase.

RUBEN
Let. Us. Go.

MR. MAN
Throw it down, little man. I'm startin' to get tired 'a your disobedient shit.

RUBEN
I know you now.

MR. MAN
You still just a baby and you don't know shit. You don't learn shit, and you don't earn shit. Now throw it down here, we be on our way.

INT. ABRA'S ROOM - SAME

The room is quickly being engulfed by flame as the CURTAINS and WOODEN FURNITURE catch. The fire is spreading fast.

BACK TO:

INT. ALAMIDE'S BUILDING - STAIRWELL - SAME

RUBEN
I know you now. You talk and you talk 'cause you know if you stop, even for a minute, everybody'll figure out that you're not saying shit. That it's just the sound of your voice, that bullshit sincerity. But you actually believe your own bullshit, so why shouldn't everyone else. And that's it, and that's all, and between the lines is... evil. And everything that comes after is death. I know you now.

MR. MAN
You know, I heard about this somewhere.
(MORE)

MR. MAN (cont'd)
Some story where the son has to kill his daddy to become a man, gain his freedom. Greek mythology, some shit.

RUBEN
I'm not your son.

MR. MAN
Maybe not, but you the closest --

BAM! Without warning RUBEN SHOOTS HIM SQUARE IN THE CHEST.

He flies back, but -- BLAM! -- manages to get one off before he hits the wall.

It NICKS RUBEN'S LEG. Ruben yells, starts LIMPING DOWN THE STEPS as Mr Man DROPS TO THE FLOOR, releasing his gun.

NOEL
(re: Mr Man)
Noooo... !

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - HALLWAY - SAME

The FIRE is now spreading into the hallways. Frantic TENANTS are running through the halls, screaming.

INT. ROLAND'S ROOM - SAME

Roland and Frank break through the window and on to the --

FIRE ESCAPE -- where hordes are falling over themselves trying to escape the flames.

FRANK
OUTTA MY WAY, MOTHERFUCKERS!!

Frank is knocked down by the rush of people and goes tumbling down the steel ladder.

INT. DIAMOND HOTEL - MR. MAN'S ROOM - SAME

Ma Love, clutching a PHOTO OF SHE AND MR. MAN tries the doorknob but burns her hand. Shrieks, pulls back. The room quickly fills with smoke --

MA LOVE
SOMEBODY... IN...
(cough)
... here...

INT. ABRA'S ROOM - SAME

The room is fully ablaze. Christine's leg catches fire, and suddenly SHE LIGHTS UP LIKE A TORCH -- SCREAMS --

She MAKES A RUN FOR THE WINDOW -- BREAKS THROUGH THE GLASS --

EXT. DIAMOND HOTEL

-- her BURNING BODY FALLS -- GLORIOUS -- LIKE A BRIGHT STAR FALLING TO THE EARTH --

-- as the DIAMOND HOTEL BURNS -- FLAMES DANCE THROUGH WINDOWS -- GLASS SHATTERS -- PEOPLE SCREAM --

THE FORTRESS OF INIQUITY CONSUMING ITSELF FOR ALL TIME.

INT. ALAMIDE'S BUILDING - STAIRWELL - SAME

Ruben gets to the bottom landing, stares down at Mr. Man who's looking at his chest in disbelief --

MR. MAN
You shot me. Motherfucker *shot me*.

Ruben reaches down to him. Pulls his CAR KEYS from his coat pocket.

RUBEN
Mind if I borrow the car, dad?

He grabs the shocked Noel by the arm -- PULLS HER OUT THE FRONT DOOR --

MR. MAN
Nigga won't last a day without me... won't last... a day...

He laughs as the WOUND TERMINALLY LEAKS -- and LEAKS -- and LEAKS --

EXT. STREET - SAME

Ruben and Noel emerge from the building into the crisp night air. The pain in his leg is evident. He can barely walk.

RUBEN
Where's the car?

Noel cries, hits him.

NOEL
WHY'D YOU HAVE TO SHOOT HIM? YOU KILLED HIM!

RUBEN
(grabs and shakes her)
WHERE'S THE CAR?

NOEL
... corner... around the corner...

RUBEN
I can't walk. Listen to me. I can't walk. You take these...

Places the keys in her hand.

RUBEN
I will stay here, and you will pull the car around, okay? Do you hear me? You will take this, put it in the trunk, and pull the car around.

He hands her the money-filled satchel.

RUBEN
You will not leave me. Do you understand? You will not leave me here because you're good. And I trust you. I trust you.

Noel is starting to get a grip. Still choking her words out through sobs.

NOEL
... where... do we go... ?

RUBEN
With ten thousand dollars? Anywhere you want?

And with that, he sends her off. Ruben watches he round the corner out of sight.

RUBEN
... don't leave me...

He clutches his leg in pain -- BLOOD SEEPING -- DRENCHING HIS PANT LEG. Suddenly, an authoritative VOICE from behind --

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey...

Ruben turns and sees the two DETECTIVES with a CLUSTER OF COPS and the Homeless Guy walking toward him.

HAL
You okay there, bud --? GUN!

They all DRAW THEIR REVOLVERS on Ruben. He looks down and sure enough his GUN IS VISIBLY TUCKED INTO HIS WAISTBAND --

KILSTEDT
GET DOWN ON THE GROUND AND PUT YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR BACK --

Ruben looks around for the Caddy.

KILSTEDT
I SAID GET DOWN, FACE TO THE PAVEMENT, HANDS BEHIND YOUR BACK --

No sign of the Caddy, Ruben defeatedly DROPS TO HIS KNEES and does what he's told.

In a rush, the Cops are upon him. They CUFF HIM -- PULL HIM UP -- PULL THE GUN FROM HIS WAIST --

Ruben scans the street -- NOTHING -- then, suddenly --

THE WHITE CADDY

Noel's behind the wheel as she approaches the scene. Ruben smiles. Knows she was coming back for him.

Ruben and the baffled Noel LOCK EYES as she passes him. He whispers, and she READS HIS LIPS --

RUBEN
... anywhere...

... and like that the car TURNS A CORNER AND SHE'S GONE... anywhere. Ruben watches it go.

CLOSE ON RUBEN'S EYES in which we see RUBEN'S PAST CLEARLY REFLECTED --

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ruben's FATHER POINTS A GUN AT HIS WIFE, as the fifteen year old Ruben watches helplessly from a doorway --

FATHER
... why wasn't I enough?

WIFE
(crying)
I'm sorry... Jack, don't...

FATHER
WHORE!!! Everyone's whore... *you* did this... to me... to us...

RUBEN
Daddy, no...

Deaf ears. He fires. Looks at Ruben.

FATHER
... she did this, Ruben... God forgive me...

Puts the gun to his own mouth. Pulls the trigger.

EXT. STREET - PRESENT

As Ruben is led to the POLICE CAR, a distant look in his eye -- he SMILES --

KILSTEDT
Fuck's this kid smilin' about? Fuck're you smilin'?

RUBEN
(hushed tone)
... I win...

KILSTEDT
Yeah, you win. All expense paid permanent vacation...

RUBEN
(unshakable)
... I win...

CLOSE ON NOEL

Behind the wheel of the Caddy. Cries. BREATHES IN THE AIR --

BACK TO:

Ruben being led to the car. Eyes filling with tears of joy. The VOICE of RONALD REAGAN'S 2ND INAUGURAL ADDRESS echoes --

RONALD REAGAN (V.O.)
We are creating a nation once again vibrant, robust and alive. But there are many mountains yet to climb. We will not rest until every American enjoys the fullness of freedom, dignity and opportunity as our birthright.

As Ruben is pushed into the POLICE CAR, he CLOSES HIS EYES and sees...

A THOROUGHBRED HORSE IN MID-RUN -- BEAUTIFUL, GRACEFUL --

RONALD REAGAN (V.O.)
These will be years when Americans have restored their confidence and tradition of progress... When Americans courageously supported the struggle...

Ruben opens his eyes as the Police Car rolls away. A look of resigned satisfaction --

RUBEN
(whispers)
... I win...

BACK TO:

NOEL

Driving faster -- something in her eyes -- a mixture of FEAR AND DETERMINATION --

RONALD REAGAN (V.O.)
... for liberty, self-government, and free enterprise throughout the world, and turned the tide of history away from totalitarian darkness...

THE HORSE

PULLING AHEAD OF THE PACE -- DETERMINED -- EMPOWERED -- FREE!

RONALD REAGAN (V.O.)
... and into the warm sunlight of human freedom.

FADE OUT.